



Welcome to Health and Safety Week 2015!

This is the third annual Health and Safety Week, and it's bigger than ever! The Health, Safety and Environment department has extended the programme this year with a focus on healthy eating and mental wellbeing, as well as offering health MOTs at even more locations. There's even a fantastic competition to win a healthy eating hamper and look out for more advice and helpful hints on improving your wellbeing during the week!

Con Feeney, Network Performance and Safety Director gives his thoughts on health and wellbeing.

“As a company, we take safety very seriously. It is at the heart of our work, it's our number one value. But what about our personal health and wellbeing? In our busy lives it can be hard to take the time to stop and consider just how we are feeling, both mentally and physically. Health and Safety Week gives you the opportunity to do just that. I'd like to encourage everyone to take advantage of what's on offer this week – get a health check, pick up some advice during the week or go along to one of the many talks and demonstrations on offer. This is one of a number of health and wellbeing initiatives planned for the coming year so keep an eye on the monthly brief and the wire for regular updates.”



SHARPEN YOUR MIND

Everyone has the occasional “senior moment”, such as forgetting a familiar name during a conversation.

Studies have shown that you can help prevent cognitive decline and reduce the risk of dementia with some basic good health habits such as staying physically active, getting enough sleep, not smoking, having good social connections, limiting alcohol to one drink a day, and eating a balanced diet low in saturated and trans fats.

Keep learning - Experts think that advanced education may help keep memory strong by getting a person into the habit of being mentally active. Challenging your brain with mental exercise is believed to activate processes that help maintain individual brain cells and stimulate communication among them.

Use all your senses - The more senses you use in learning something, the more of your brain will be involved in retaining the memory. Challenge all your senses as you venture into the unfamiliar and appreciate your everyday surroundings by finding new ways to activate your senses. *Read more about Mindfulness on page 4.*

Believe in yourself - Myths about ageing can contribute to a failing memory. Middle-aged and older learners do worse on memory tasks when they're exposed to negative stereotypes about aging and memory. If you believe you can improve and you translate that belief into practice, you have a better chance of keeping your mind sharp.



SUPPORT JIM AS HE KICKS THE HABIT!



Today is the day Safety Engineer Jim Barry goes smoke free. It's taken coercion, threats, even tears but Jim is determined to give up his beloved Malboros once and for all. The Health Safety and Environment department are supporting Jim 100% and have pledged donations to three charities to encourage him along his journey.

If any other staff would like to support Jim by donating, please see your Health and Safety Week co-ordinator or any member of the Health, Safety & Environment department. The NIE Networks Staff and Pensioners Charity Fund will also match any donations made up to £200 per charity.

Anyone interested in giving up smoking and looking for advice should contact Anna Caldwell, NIE Networks Stop Smoking Co-Ordinator on 32194.

WINTER IS COMING . . .

But that doesn't mean you have to stop exercising! Regular exercise will make you feel more energetic, which should make it a little easier to get out of your warm bed on cold, dark mornings.

Your body's defences will also benefit. Research suggests that moderate exercise can strengthen the immune system, thereby reducing the risk of coughs and colds. If the shorter days are negatively affecting your mood, being active can improve your sense of wellbeing.

NIE Networks Safety Engineer Brian Sinclair is a keen triathlete, using the winter months to train for competitions. Pictured in action above, Brian says putting safety first when cycling and running is vital during the darker days. "I do tend to train outside quite a bit during the winter, it's better to replicate the physical environment you encounter during a race. However, if the weather is really bad and visibility is poor, then I go to the gym or hit the pool."

Brian's top tips for staying safe include:

- **Dress right** – Ensure you have a good, correctly fitting helmet along with waterproof, windproof and breathable jacket and gloves. Layer up and make sure they all have Hi-Vis built in.
- **Light up!** – One of the biggest risks when running or cycling in the winter is not being seen. Lights serve two purposes – to see and to be seen.
- **Get your bike winter ready** – Have your bike serviced, mudguards, brakes and tyres are all key.
- **Take care and leave time** – Roads can be slippery, man hole covers wet and other drivers' vehicles may be misted up.
- **Never risk the bike in frosty conditions** and if you still want to run, do it off road with good trail shoes.
- **Enjoy** and have something warm to drink when you return home!



I NEED SOME ZZZZZZZZZS!

Do you feel you're tired all the time? You could be skimping on your sleep. Here's some tips from the Sleep Council to help you have a more restful night!

- **Keep regular hours**

Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day will programme your body to sleep better. Choose a time when you're most likely to feel sleepy.

- **Create a restful sleeping environment**

Keep your bedroom for rest and sleep and make it as quiet and dark as possible. Temperature, lighting and noise should be controlled so that the bedroom environment helps you fall and stay asleep. It's difficult to get restful sleep on a mattress that's too soft or too hard, or a bed that's too small or old. If you have a noisy pet that sleeps in the room with you, consider moving it somewhere else!

- **Exercise regularly**

Moderate exercise on a regular basis, such as swimming or walking, can help relieve some of the tension built up over the day. However, make sure that you don't do vigorous exercise too close to bedtime as it may keep you awake.

- **Don't over indulge and cut the caffeine**

Cut down on stimulants such as caffeine in tea or coffee, especially in the evening. They interfere with the process of falling asleep, and they prevent deep sleep. The effects of caffeine can last up to 24 hours, so it could affect your sleep. Instead, have a warm, milky drink or herbal tea. Too much food or alcohol, especially late at night, can interrupt your sleep patterns. Alcohol may help you to fall asleep, but it may disrupt your sleep later on in the night.

- **Don't smoke**

It's bad for sleep. Smokers take longer to fall asleep, they wake up more frequently, and they often have more disrupted sleep.

- **Try to relax before going to bed**

Have a warm bath, listen to quiet music or do some gentle yoga to relax the mind and body. Your doctor may be able to recommend a helpful relaxation CD.

- **Write away your worries**

Deal with worries or a heavy workload by making lists of things to be tackled the next day. If you tend to lie in bed thinking about tomorrow's tasks, set aside time before bedtime to review the day and make plans for the next day. The goal is to avoid doing these things when you're in bed, trying to sleep.

- **Don't worry in bed**

If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing and then return to bed.

Night night, sleep tight . . .

FOOD FOR EXERCISE

These raw chocolate brownies balls are a great way to refuel during exercise, and they're also a healthy snack when you're out and about during the day.



Take five ingredients . . .

- 225g hazelnuts
- Pinch of salt
- 150g pitted dates
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 50g unsweetened cocoa powder

Three simple steps . . .

1. Add hazelnuts and salt to a blender or food processor. Mix until the hazelnuts are finely ground.
2. Add the dates, vanilla, and cocoa powder to the blender. Mix well until everything is combined. With the blender still running, add a couple drops of water at a time to make the mixture stick together.
3. Using a spatula, transfer the mixture into a bowl. Using your hands, form small round balls, rolling in your palm. You can also roll in toasted coconut. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING FORUM UPDATE

Health and Safety Week coincides with European Safety Week, which this year looks at Healthy Workplaces. A healthy workplace is a more productive workplace with staff feeling happier and more engaged. As a result of feedback from the last Employee Survey, NIE Networks set up a Health and Wellbeing forum last year, with representatives from across the business. The Forum meets regularly to review the existing initiatives the company currently has in place and proactively considers and promotes new initiatives. These are all aimed at maintaining and improving the health and wellbeing of our employees. Earlier this year the Forum worked with the Patient and Client Council to deliver a series of Health Fairs at locations across the company.

HR Business Partner Julie Henderson says having a mix of office and field staff on the forum has helped with future strategy. Julie says, "Our hardworking staff are fully committed to the Zero Harm ethos, integrating safe working practices in every aspect of their work. However, we can often neglect our own health and ignore some of the warning signs our minds and bodies give us. It is therefore important as a company that we strive to support our people. We are working to promote wellbeing initiatives throughout the company and if anyone has any ideas, please get in touch with myself or any member of the Forum."

FEELING STRESSED?

Stress is a normal part of life. Many events that happen to you and around you, and many things that you do yourself, put stress on your body. You can experience stress from your environment, your body and your thoughts. Stress can be positive, keeping you alert and ready to avoid danger. Stress becomes negative when a person faces continuous challenges without relief or relaxation between challenges.

Stress that continues without relief can lead to a condition called distress, a negative stress reaction. Distress can lead to physical symptoms including headaches, upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain and problems with sleeping. Research suggests that stress can also bring on or worsen certain symptoms or diseases.

Stress also becomes harmful when people turn to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs to try to relieve their stress. Unfortunately, instead of relieving the stress and returning the body to a relaxed state, these substances tend to keep the body in a stressed state and cause more problems. The Health and Safety Executive says around 10.4 million working days are lost each year to stress, depression or anxiety. The NHS says psychological problems, including stress, anxiety and depression, are behind one in five visits to a GP. Stress can play a part in problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma and arthritis.

Stress can affect all aspects of your life, including your emotions, behaviour, thinking ability and physical health. No part of the body is immune, but, because people handle stress differently, symptoms of stress can vary. You may experience any of the following symptoms of stress.

Emotional symptoms of stress include:

- Becoming easily agitated, frustrated and moody
- Feeling overwhelmed, like you are losing control or need to take control
- Having difficulty relaxing and quieting your mind
- Feeling bad about yourself (low self-esteem), lonely, worthless and depressed
- Avoiding others.

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Low energy
- Headaches
- Upset stomach, including diarrhoea, constipation and nausea
- Aches, pains, and tense muscles
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat
- Insomnia
- Frequent colds and infections

FIND CLARITY

If you want to talk to someone in confidence, you can speak to a member of Clarity Associates, the current welfare provider.

Clarity Associates provides a confidential helpline service which is available to everyone at NIE Networks and it enables employees to confidentially discuss work related or personal issues with a trained and experienced counsellor either by telephone or face to face.

Do I have to make an appointment outside working hours?

You can make an appointment both inside and outside working hours.

Where do face to face appointments take place?

Clarity counsellors are flexible to meet you wherever you feel comfortable. They can come to your office, your home, or you can visit them or even meet in a neutral venue.

How do I contact Clarity Associates?

Contact Clarity by telephone or email.

Welfare Officer: Stafford Thompson

Helpline number: 028 867 68674

Mobile number: 07711842607

Email: jpssthompson@btinternet.com



Be a better you this autumn! 

As part of Health and Safety Week 2015, the Health, Safety and Environment department is offering staff a competition to win a fantastic healthy eating hamper from local company Indie Fude!



INDIE FUDE
INDEPENDENT FOOD CO

Question:
How many portions of fruit and vegetables should you aim to eat each day?

Send your answer to Julia.Carson@nienetworks.co.uk by Thursday 22nd October for your chance to win!

NUTRITION IS VITAL!

Vital Nutrition's Jane McClenaghan will be visiting four offices as part of Health and Safety Week. If you can't make one of the healthy eating demonstrations, here are some of Jane's top tips for optimum health!

Always eat breakfast – eat a healthy breakfast within 45 minutes of waking to kickstart your day

Five a day – eat five different colour fruit and veg every day

Drink more water – get your daily intake of 1.5 to 2 litres every day

Swap the sugars – check your labels. Over 15g per 100g is too high

Watch the caffeine – too much caffeine can leave you jittery, shaky and nervous so cut it down

Pile in the (essential) fats – stock up on nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil, oily fish and houmous to get your fill of healthy fats

Eat with the seasons – locally produced, seasonal food is nutrient packed and tastes great

Avoid fad diets – a varied healthy diet is the best way to achieve optimum health

Relax more to help digestion, support your immune system and balance stress

Exercise more – just 30 minutes, five times a week will boost energy levels, release endorphins and help manage your weight.

For more advice check out www.vital-nutrition.co.uk



AN INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS

It can be easy to rush through life without stopping to notice much. Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you – can improve your mental wellbeing.

Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness', and you can take steps to develop it in your own life. Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice which is very relevant for life today. Mindfulness is a very simple concept. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally. This increases awareness, clarity and acceptance of our present-moment reality.

Good mental wellbeing means feeling good about life and yourself, and being able to get on with life in the way you want.

Becoming more aware of the present moment means noticing the sights, smells, sounds and tastes that you experience, as well as the thoughts and feelings that occur from one moment to the next. It can help us enjoy the world more and understand ourselves better.

It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. We lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and end up living 'in our heads', caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour. An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment.

How you can be mindful

Reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness.

It can be helpful to pick a time – the morning journey to work or a walk at lunchtime – during which you decide to be aware of the sensations created by the world around you. Trying new things, such as sitting in a different seat in meetings or going somewhere new for lunch, can also help you notice the world in a new way.

Notice the busyness of your mind. Just observe your own thoughts. Stand back and watch them floating past, like leaves on a stream. There is no need to try to change the thoughts, or argue with them, or judge them: just observe.

You can practise this anywhere, but it can be especially helpful to take a mindful approach if you realise that, for several minutes, you have been "trapped" in reliving past problems or "pre-living" future worries. If you are interested in learning more visit www.nhs.uk and try in Mindfulness.