



**SAFETY**

Nebraska Building Chapter

## AGC Safety Initiative E-News

March 3, 2021

**OUR Safety MISSION:** Help each other enforce safety rules to ensure that every person on construction site goes home safe and healthy at end of the workday.

**Calendar of Events** – [Learn more](#)

[COVID-19 Resources Update](#) Updated information with quick references available.

### **COVID-19 burnout: Keeping your workforce energized and safe**

Author: Janice Pintar, JD

By now, everybody knows the drill: wear a mask, wash your hands, have a video or phone conference instead of meeting face to face, stay six feet apart. The list of COVID-19 precautions goes on and on. And for good reason. Even as vaccines may make it possible to bring employees back to work, COVID-19 continues pose a significant risk to the health and welfare of your employees, clients and your business. How do you reinforce safety precautions, especially as so many employees are starting to feel “pandemic fatigue”?

#### **Pandemic fatigue** (is spreading)

The World Health Organization (WHO) explains pandemic fatigue as a demotivation for following recommended protective behaviors during a pandemic. Also called “caution fatigue” or “COVID-19 fatigue,” pandemic fatigue is a natural response likened to a battery that starts off strong and loses energy over the duration of its use. Stressors and restrictions related to the pandemic can cause feelings of depression, anxiety and distraction, as well as a disinterest in continuing safe behaviors. This can cause individuals to be less vigilant about COVID-19 protocols, such as consistent mask wearing or hand washing. It is not unlikely that your employees are feeling the same way toward the various protective measures you have put in place. Left unchecked, this may result in the failure to follow protocols and increase risk of COVID-19 exposure in your workplace.

#### **Stay the course**

This is easier said than done when everyone just wants to “get back to normal.” Whether it is missing chatting in the breakroom or feeling the isolation of working remotely, the pandemic has taken a real toll on the workforce. Recent studies have suggested that between 58 and 75 percent of workers reported feelings of burn-out, and much of this increase is directly attributable to the pandemic. Easing back on COVID-19 protocols to address burnout is not the safest solution to this problem. Instead, employers should proactively remind employees of the importance of the adhering to safety guidelines, especially as employers start to bring employees back.

#### **Reinforce and re-educate**

Employers can both reinforce the COVID-19 related precautions employees are expected to follow, and also take the time to appreciate employees’ efforts and to thank employees for their continued diligence. This is also a good time to re-educate employees as to why certain precautions are still being taken in the workplace. As many managers and HR professionals know, when employees understand the “why” behind a task or rule,

there is a much better chance they will support it willingly, rather than grudgingly. This in turn fosters employee engagement and “buy-in” instead of disengagement or resentment toward the rule or restriction.

### **But be flexible**

If employers have learned one thing about responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is to be ready to change, as federal, state, and local guidance has been developed, revised, and changed again. Now may be a great time to review your COVID-19 protocols and related work procedures to determine whether certain measures can or should be tweaked now, or in the near future, or just need to be reinforced. Asking employees about their work experiences and feelings related to COVID-19 safety or the impact of the pandemic on work goals and tasks is a great way to begin this review. When employees feel that they are a part of the process, they are much more likely to feel satisfied with the outcome, even if the change is a minor one.

And if certain safety protocols cannot be changed right now, it may still be possible to address and try to remediate some of the pain points your employees may be experiencing. For example, if your workforce has been and will remain remote for the near future you may want to check in with your remote employees to assess their stress level and ability to cope with working from home. Are there some adjustments that can be made to increase productivity and lessen any stressors that come from the remote environment?

In other words, while we see the light at the end of the tunnel, there is still a long road ahead. Employers should be reassessing and considering how to combat the very natural feelings of pandemic fatigue and ensure employees are prepared to work safely into 2021.

## **A Workout for Your Mental Health**

### **Keep stress from the COVID pandemic and other events under control by sticking with these daily practices**

Stressed out? Grumpy? Tired all the time? You need a mental-fitness regimen.

Author: Elizabeth Bernstein

For months, therapists have reported a significant increase in clients who are anxious, worried or depressed over current events—the Covid-19 pandemic, economic woes, civil unrest. And while they can teach coping skills, such as emotion regulation, to help deal with the stress, they say it’s also important for people to proactively take steps to be mentally healthy, just as they would if they wanted to be physically fit. “If you wait until a major stressor hits to try and bolster your mental health, it’s like trying to inflate your life raft while you are already drowning at sea,” says Wendy Troxel, a clinical psychologist and senior behavioral and social scientist at Rand Corp.

Many people turn to talk therapy, exercise, meditation and a healthy diet to do this. Shirlee Hoffman, a 75-year-old retired marketing consultant in Chicago, limits her news consumption to about five minutes a day. Erin Wiley, 50, a licensed psychotherapist in Toledo, Ohio, uses an app to track the things for which she is grateful. Rhonda Steele, 62, a special-education teacher in Sellersburg, Ind., prays and reads devotions. Dwight Oxley, 84, a retired physician in Wichita, Kan., reads and plays the piano. Rachel Glyn, 66, a retired aesthetician in Philadelphia, tries to do as many things as possible for others. Michael Schauch, 40, an investment portfolio manager in Squamish, British Columbia, rock climbs—he says the view gives him perspective. Stedman Stevens, 62, the CEO of an aviation technology company in Wilmington, N.C., takes 15 minutes each afternoon to sit alone without distractions. “I listen to what my mind shows me,” he says. “This restores my mental strength.”

What steps should you include in your mental-fitness regimen? Here is advice from the experts.

**Make sleep nonnegotiable.** Most adults need 7-8 hours of quality sleep. “Following a consistent sleep-wake schedule sends a powerful signal to the brain that the world is safe and secure, which can help reduce anxiety and foster resilience,” says Rand’s Dr. Troxel, author of “Sharing the Covers: Every Couple’s Guide to Better Sleep.” She suggests setting a consistent wake-up time, counting backward to determine when to go to bed,

and creating a relaxing wind-down routine, starting an hour before bedtime. Take a bath, read a book, turn down the lights and the thermostat. (65-68 degrees is ideal.) Disconnect from technology to minimize your exposure to distressing news and light.

**Set a routine.** Get up at the same time each day. Get dressed! Create a morning ritual—many people write in a journal or set an intention for the day, although just drinking coffee in the same chair works. (I drink a large glass of water first thing, then a cup of coffee, and play with my dog.) Eat meals and exercise at set times. This helps create a sense of predictability in a world that feels out of control.

**Calm your mind.** You can't cope with stress well if your brain is on high alert at all times, says Carolyn Daitch, a psychologist in Farmington Hills, Mich., and co-author of "The Road to Calm Workbook." She recommends beginning the day with 15-20 minutes of yoga, meditation or prayer, then scheduling four "mini interventions" during the day—a two-minute breathing exercise or other quick tension-releasing technique. (One of her favorites: Make a tight fist with one hand, imagine it holding all the tension in your body for 10 seconds, release it.) She says to think of these practices as a "stress inoculation."

**Watch your language.** The words we use to talk to ourselves color our outlook. So try to replace "hot" language with "cooler" language, suggests Patricia Deldin, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. ("This is a challenge but I can handle it," not "I'm overwhelmed.") And stop "shoulding" yourself. ("I would like to..." not "I should.") "A simple language change can influence our feelings and, subsequently, our actions," says Dr. Deldin, who is CEO of Mood Lifters, a mental-wellness program.

**Practice compassion.** Research shows self-compassionate people are happier, more optimistic, more motivated and more resilient. Yet, too often, we are mean to ourselves. Treat yourself with kindness and understanding. Start by acknowledging when something is painful. (Dr. Daitch recommends putting your hand on your heart and saying: "This isn't easy.") Then talk to yourself as you would to your best friend. And remind yourself that everyone goes through difficult times. This diminishes your stress reaction and connects you to other people.

**Move your body.** Research shows that aerobic exercise reduces fatigue and tension, and improves alertness, concentration, sleep, mood, and self-esteem, according to Dr. Deldin. And studies show that exercise in nature has even more benefits: It reduces the body's stress response, lowers cortisol levels and blood pressure, and it gives you a sense of awe, which boosts mood. Dr. Deldin recommends 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day, which can be broken up into small periods. (Even five minutes of exercise begins to decrease anxiety, she says.)

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— Dr. Wendy Troxel, Rand Corp.

**Create a media diet.** There's too much negative news these days. Decide how much you will consume—think of this as a "news calorie count"—and stick with it. Set aside blocks of time to turn off your phone. Purge negative people from your social media feed. Look for positive streams to follow or articles to read. (My feeds are largely about sailing, scuba diving gardening or baking.)

**Choose extracurricular activities wisely.** Research shows that pleasant activities, ones that give you a sense of purpose (such as volunteering), and ones that make you feel accomplished or masterful (such as learning a language) improve mental health. So pick up a new hobby, practice an instrument, work on improving at a sport. "The ability to exert control over something provides a sense of self-satisfaction and contentment," says Brad Stulberg, an executive coach in Asheville, N.C., and author of "Peak Performance." "And progress nourishes the soul."

**Cultivate supportive relationships.** People with strong relationships are emotionally healthier. So make a commitment to connect regularly with friends and family. Set a goal to reach out to one person a day. Ask

about the other person and discuss something other than the day's awful news. And be open about how you are, because vulnerability can be bonding.

**Be grateful.** Especially for your loved ones. And let them know. Everyone is feeling challenged right now. When I'm annoyed with someone in my life, I think of at least five things I love about the person. Often, I'm surprised that my list goes on and on. I'm smiling before I'm done counting.

### **Safety Initiative Goals:**

As an AGC Nebraska Building Chapter member, are you participating with:

- 100% of all AGC members and other contractors on AGC jobsites enforcing OSHA standards as they apply to falls, electrical safety and possible another topic.
- 100% of all AGC members will have set their own company goals to improve safety in their firm and have a way to measure progress towards the goal.
- 100% of all AGC members will encourage and support all contractors on their jobsites to set their own company goals for improving safety.