

# FIRST CHOICE HEALTH

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

<http://www.FirstChoiceEap.com>

### Quarterly Newsletter

#### The Gifts That Keep On Giving

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With the holiday season unfolding and upon us, the EAP wants to emphasize the importance of making & taking time for Self Care in the days ahead – and throughout the coming year. Self Care is best

described as purposefully attending to your physical, emotional, spiritual, interpersonal, and financial well being. A balanced lifestyle is an especially important element of health and well being.

For most of us, the holiday season is a yearly ritual of shifting into emotional and physical overdrive. We do this in an attempt to embrace the traditions of the season and manage the increased demands on our time. What's frequently overlooked amidst the hustle of the holidays is the importance of replenishing personal energies.

In addition to the usual obligations of work and family, the holiday season can be a time of magnified stress and conflicting feelings (ranging from anticipation & happiness to disappointment & sadness). When you're constantly on the go, attempting to satisfy the spoken and unspoken needs & expectations of partners, children, parents, siblings, friends, and co-workers, the price paid is often a sense of physical and emotional depletion.

The rewards and joys of doing for others are legendary and important to our sense of health and connectedness. On the other hand, a steady diet of doing for others – without time for rest, renewal, and Self Care -increases our vulnerability to stress-related feelings such as emptiness, anxiety, dissatisfaction, or depression. This is especially true during the holiday season.

Most of us know better than to run a marathon without being physically fit and doing the appropriate training. Injuries from over-extending yourself in the annual dash to the finish line of the holiday season may be less physical, but they are no less harmful to your emotional health and general well being.

Here are some strategies for practicing Self Care & maintaining balance throughout the holidays:

- Understand that Self Care is not the same as selfishness. Self Care increases your effectiveness and energy, to the benefit of others and yourself.
- Take frequent breaks to stretch and release the tension that collects in your mind & body. This is easy to do – even at work.
- Meditate or sit quietly - inhale slowly and deeply through your nostrils, and exhale slowly and fully - allowing troublesome thoughts to dissolve. As the writer Montaigne noted centuries ago: The pleasantest things in the world are pleasant thoughts; and the great art of life is to have as many of them as possible.
- If you have an exercise routine, maintain it to minimize the negative effects of holiday stress and seasonal pressures.
- Take short walks (even for 10 minutes) in a place that allows you to refocus your energies, appreciate your surroundings, and connect with the spirit of the season.
- Continue to attend to medical needs or health conditions for which you are being treated. The holiday season is not a time to drop your guard or minimize your needs.

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## Continued: The Gifts That Keep on Giving

- Select foods that support your energy over foods that cause you to feel bloated and tired.
- Realize that inconvenience (especially when traveling and shopping) is a common feature of the holiday season, and be prepared to adjust your expectations and responses accordingly. Be flexible and realistic.
- Minimize your intake of alcohol and caffeine, both of which can rob you of energy, disrupt the quality of your sleep, and increase the amount of stress on your body.
- Get others involved in shopping, preparing meals, making travel plans, and coordinating the events of the season.
- Establish new traditions and activities that are meaningful and replenishing to you, and consider letting go of activities or obligations that cause you to feel as if you're merely "going through the motions."
- Avoid becoming over-committed during the holiday season. Identify your priorities, and give yourself permission to seek quality over quantity.
- Make use of the range of Employee Assistance Program services available to you. It can be very helpful to spend time with an effective counselor to prepare for the traditions, family gatherings, and emotional experiences of the holiday season. A few solution-focused visits can help you find ways to achieve greater balance, establish a plan for regular Self-Care, and work through the conflicting feelings of joy and dread that are commonly experienced at this time of year.

At work, at home, in rest, or at play, the choices and actions of Self Care truly are the gifts that keep on giving – during the holiday season and throughout the year. The EAP invites you to renew your commitment to balance between responsibilities at work and quality of life at home.



### Home For The Holidays

For the holidays, family members often come from different parts of the country and have not seen their loved ones for some time. It is a time to get back in touch with older parents' daily lives, wishes, and needs. As our parents age, issues may arise that we do not anticipate.

This season while you are enjoying your parents' company, by talking to them on the phone, visiting them in a nursing facility or going to "home sweet home" - think about the following questions:

- Are my parents safe in their home(s)? Look around the home. Is there anything what could cause a fall or other injury?
- Does the bathroom have non-skid rugs, a bathtub mat and grab bars?
- Does the smoke detector work?
- Are your parents being well cared for in their environment? Do they complain about the care?
- Are your parents able to drive any longer?
- Are they eating well? Check the cupboards and refrigerator.
- Do you see signs of deterioration that are not being attended to?

Once you have gathered answers to these and other questions, you may need assistance to resolve the problems you have identified. Preventing a crisis will not only reduce the amount of anxiety and pain for your parents but also reduce the costs of health care. Be a detective and advocate for your older parents. It's the best gift you can give them. Happy holidays!

Your Adult/Elder service includes consultation, information and resources to help you help your older adult.

## Tips to Boost Your Spending Spirit and Reduce Your Holiday Debt Stress

The day after Thanksgiving is the most anticipated shopping day of the year—the beginning of the holiday shopping season. It's also a time when poor financial planning can lead to overspending and deeper debt.

“When you don't plan, spending for gift-giving can become a burden,” says CCCS of Olympic - South Sound and Credit Counseling NW President Laura Johnson. “Now is the time to compare your income and savings to your credit card debt, living expenses and other financial obligations. This assessment should help you determine the number of gifts you can afford to give and the total amount you can afford to spend.”

With consumer spending at its lowest point in nine years, CCCS of Olympic - South Sound and Credit Counseling NW offers three tips to help holiday shoppers spend wisely: Draft a spending plan now, stay the course over the holidays and breathe easier in January.

### 1) Draft a Plan now

- **Develop Your Holiday Budget:** Determine what financial expenses you'll have during the holiday season. Decide who you'll shop for and the number of gifts you'll need to buy. Don't give more gifts than you can afford.
- **Boost Your Holiday Spending Account:** Ask about ways to make overtime pay at work. Look for seasonal, part-time employment and consider using part of any holiday bonus to offset expenses. Find ways to cut your energy and utility bills, like turning off the lights when you leave a room and turning off the TV when you're not watching.

### 2) Stay the Course Over the Holidays

- **Avoid Last-Minute Shopping:** Shopping under stress can lead to more spending. You might buy what's easiest, which may not be most economical.
- **Shop Smart—Look for Deals:** Look for sales, discounts, coupons in newspapers and deals online. Ask about markdowns after the holidays. It may be worth buying gifts after December 25<sup>th</sup>.
- **Track Your Expenses:** Tally your receipts from credit card, check and cash purchases. Don't spend more money than you've set aside. Once you're done shopping, stop. More mall time can amount to more spending.

### 3) Breathe Easier in January

- **Maintain financial planning momentum:** If you've kept to your budget, you'll start the year with less debt stress. Don't stop your financial planning after the holidays. Plan for the year. Balance your household budget and you could have even more money to fuel your holiday spending spree in 2003.

### Need Help Getting Your Household Back on Track?

CCCS of Olympic - South Sound and Credit Counseling NW have trained and certified credit counselors who offer financial management and debt reduction services that are low-cost—and free. Contact the First Choice Health Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-777-4114 for more information about—or referral to—credit counseling agencies in your area. The EAP suggests asking these questions of consumer credit counseling agencies before deciding to use their services:



### Quality Assurance/Credibility

- Are they members of the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC)?
- Are they consumer-focused or are they driven by their financial bottom line at the expense of consumers?
- Is the agency accredited by a reputable third-party organization? Does the organization certify the agencies' services are quality and in the consumers' best interest?
- Are their counselors certified or trained in basic money management services? Or are they telemarketers whose only goal is to sign consumers up for a debt payment plan?

### Fund Management and Safety

- How are client funds collected and dispersed to creditors?
- Do they retain any client payments for their company?
- Are clients fully credited for all and full payments to creditors?

### Service Delivery

- What fees does the agency charge? Do they disclose their fees and services up-front?
- Is counseling offered in person or by telephone? Does the consumer have a choice?
- Does the agency provide financial management or budget counseling in addition to debt management services? Does the consumer have a choice of service?
- How will working with the organization impact customers' credit?

All of us at First Choice Health EAP wish you and yours a satisfying holiday season and a healthier-than-ever 2003.

1-800-777-4114



# FIRST CHOICE HEALTH

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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### Winter Newsletter

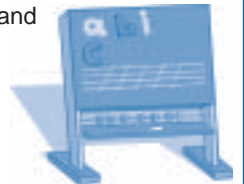
#### Toy Safety Tips

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission offers tips for giving toys safely at the holiday season and throughout the year:

- Select toys to suit the age, abilities, skills, and interest level of the intended child. Toys too advanced may pose safety hazards to younger children.
- For infants, toddlers, and all children who still mouth objects, avoid toys with small parts which could pose a fatal choking hazard.
- For all children under age eight, avoid toys that have sharp edges and points.
- Do not purchase electric toys with heating elements for children under age eight.
- Be a label reader. Look for labels that give age recommendations and use that information as a guide.
- Look for sturdy construction, such as tightly secured eyes, noses, and other potential small parts.
- Check instructions to make sure they make sense to you, and, if appropriate, to your child.
- Discard plastic wrappings on toys immediately, which can cause suffocation, before they become deadly playthings.

Giving children toys during the holidays should be fun for everyone. Keep safety in mind, follow these suggestions and use common sense in making good choices for your toy purchases.

**Happy Holidays From Your Child and Family Consultants at  
First Choice Health EAP  
(800) 777-4114**



## QUALITY, CONVENIENCE, & RELIABILITY

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. If specific health or medical advice or assistance is desired, the services of a licensed healthcare professional should be sought. The information in the First Choice Health EAP Quarterly Newsletter is not meant to replace the advice or expertise of your physician or healthcare provider. If you are experiencing health problems or contemplating lifestyle changes such as diet or exercise, consult your healthcare provider ahead of time to ensure your well being.



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**Bringing Balance to  
Work, Home and Life**