



The Importance of Building Personal Immunity and Resiliency to Benefit Health and Enhance Success in Your Life and Accounting Career

By George Violette, Ph.D., CPA, MCHC

An organization's most important assets are its employees and principals. Management can help protect these assets by promoting healthy lifestyle activities that can assist employees in building a more resilient personal immune system. A resilient immune system allows individuals to better deal with, and adapt to, personal health challenges. Resilience is the capacity of an immune system to return to a healthy state of wellness after an external challenge, such as a virus.

Much of the media coverage and government recommendations for prevention of infection from the COVID-19 virus is through avoidance that focuses on prevention through careful hand washing, use of masks and social distancing. While the advice is very important, that's not all we can do. A strong personal immune system is a crucial line of defense against pathogens of all types, including COVID-19.

A strong immune system acts as an important barrier between the body and the things that can make it sick.

While a strong immune system won't necessarily prevent all illnesses, research shows that duration and severity of illness are typically reduced if you have a strong immune system.

Our immune systems can be strengthened or weakened based upon our lifestyle choices. Eating immunity-boosting foods, engaging in regular exercise, obtaining sufficient restful sleep, managing stress, and connecting with supportive, positive people and nature all work to boost our immunity.

Conversely, poor food choices, being sedentary, not obtaining enough sleep, staying in a state of constant worry and stress, and lack of a supportive environment all contribute to a weakened immune system.

To the extent possible, we should all try to be proactive in building our personal immune systems to facilitate and maintain good health. Organizations can help their employees build resiliency through

their support and encouragement of positive lifestyle choices that will increase their overall health and therefore lead to enhanced career opportunities.

Immune-Boosting Foods

Nutrition is one key factor that can positively influence and build resiliency for the immune system. Identifying which foods are best for us to eat to maintain and boost health often seems confusing.

In his best-selling book *Food*, Mark Hyman, MD, director of the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine, provides a clear road map with scientifically backed research and analysis, in a readable and concise manner. In general, he recommends we eat real, whole foods, local when possible, fresh and unprocessed, free from chemicals and additives.

Strive to eat a diet that includes a wide variety of whole foods, which includes greens and other vegetables, berries and other fruits, nuts and seeds, mushrooms, herbs and quality

proteins such as wild-caught salmon. Avoid highly processed and high sugar foods.

Real, whole food is medicine for our bodies. What is real food? Ask yourself, did nature make it or has it been manufactured? Do you recognize the ingredients? Is it full of healthy nutrients? Food is a powerful opportunity to build immunity and create health.

What can you do at the organization level? You can provide healthy snacks, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. If you are providing lunch or dinner due to meetings or late work, choose to provide real, whole foods, such as green salads and whole grains; avoid fast foods and sugary snacks.

Exercise and Movement

Doing regular movement and exercise is a great way to increase physical health, reduce stress and build personal immunity. Exercise helps the body because it increases circulation, which can then help to deliver essential nutrients to keep us healthy. The lymphatic system, which is used to remove metabolic waste, relies on physical movement to help keep this moving most efficiently.

Engaging in exercise doesn't mean you have to go to a gym or studio. Simple exercise and movement at home and work, such as squats, push-ups and walking, can be greatly beneficial.

Build exercise into your workday. Encourage employees to take brief breaks to exercise and move. Sit less, stand more; get up at least once an hour for five minutes to move and stretch. Consider a standing desk; perhaps pair it with a special treadmill to use at your desk. Take

the stairs. Park further away. Walk, run, bike, hike, swim, do yoga or stretch. The key is to do what you enjoy and then you will keep doing it.

Sleep

Quality and sufficient sleep is very important for building and maintaining a healthy personal immune system. Studies have shown



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that chronic sleep deprivation is associated with decreased immunity.

In 2012, the National Institute for Health suggested several tips for healthy sleep, such as:

- Trying to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day;
- Doing a relaxing activity, such as reading or listening to soothing music as part of a nightly bedtime ritual;
- Avoiding caffeine in the afternoon and evening; and
- Avoiding large meals and beverages late at night.

They also recommend a cool, dark sleep environment, free from

electronic devices. Other sleep experts recommend eliminating blue light a couple of hours before bedtime by disconnecting from all electronic devices or at least wearing blue light blocking glasses.

Dr. Matthew Walker, Director of UC Berkeley Center for Human Sleep Science and author of the book *Why We Sleep*, presents detailed scientific evidence on what activities and environments promote or inhibit sufficient, quality sleep. Walker writes that sleep builds your immune system to help fight against infection and sickness, while lack of sleep reduces resilience. He suggests that we strive for about eight hours of sleep each night to maximize our health. He recommends a bedroom temperature of about 65 degrees and a darkened room free from all lights.

The eight hours should be of actual sleep, not just eight hours spent trying to sleep – so if it takes you several minutes to fall asleep, or you wake up multiple times in the night, you may need more than eight hours in bed to obtain adequate quality sleep. Encourage your employees to obtain sufficient and quality sleep for their personal health benefit and for the benefit of the work they will do after having a good night's rest.

Stress Management

While feelings of stress have some short-term benefits that may help sharpen your focus and contribute to decisive actions, ongoing chronic stress is not beneficial to your health. When you are constantly in a state of stress, your cortisol levels run high all the time, which suppresses your immune system. We can't eliminate all stress from our lives, but we can work to control our responses to it. Regular exercise and quality sleep as discussed previously can help contribute to stress reduction.

There are also several additional practices and techniques that can aid

you in reducing stress while building personal immunity. These include:

- Deep breathing;
- Meditation;
- Getting out in nature;
- Listening to soothing music;
- Laughing;
- Connecting with friends; and
- Keeping a gratitude journal.

These activities typically cost very little and offer a great return on your time investment.

You don't have to learn extensive or difficult methods to engage in deep breathing or meditation – the key is consistency in practicing these techniques. An excellent book that outlines some simple techniques is *Stress Less, Accomplish More*, by Emily Fletcher. There are also numerous videos available on YouTube.

Spending time in nature allows you to take a break from technology and obtain some natural vitamin D from the sun. Research shows vitamin D is very important in immunity enhancement.

You don't have to go away for the weekend to benefit from nature; just find a place to be outside every day for even a few minutes to listen to the song of the birds and enjoy the energy of the trees. A local park or trail, or even your backyard, can serve as a great opportunity to let go of a little stress and relax.

Laughter and soothing music are both good stress medicine. Watch funny movies and videos; listen to relaxing music – either or both will reduce your stress. Choose what you enjoy!

Keep in contact with supportive friends and seek out positive people. Social support is an important source in managing stress. The firm can be a significant part of this social support by providing powerful opportunities for connection and community through arrangement and scheduling of a variety of engaging events and activities for employees to build relationships and minimize stress.

Another stress reducer is to reflect on all you have to be thankful for; perhaps keep a gratitude journal. The simple technique of writing down two or three things at the end of each day that you were grateful for today before going to bed is a powerful way to develop and maintain positive feelings, reduce stress and perhaps even assist with transition to a restful sleep.

Accountants Confidential Assistance Network

The accounting profession is demanding of your time, attention and energy. It shouldn't take a toll on your physical and mental health.

The Accountants Confidential Assistance Network (ACAN) helps you learn how to merge healthier living with your demanding accounting career. And if you are struggling with alcohol addiction, substance abuse or mental health issues, ACAN is here to help with referrals to professionals who are familiar with your unique challenges.

Don't hesitate to get the help you need. Call 866-766-2226 or visit www.tscpa.org/resources/acan today.

Use of a Health Coach

Another possibility to consider is the use of a health coach to provide group educational training on lifestyle topics, as well as individual sessions for interested employees. A health coach is someone who works with individuals and groups to inspire and guide them in positive behavioral changes they wish to make in their lifestyle, such as with nutrition,

exercise, sleep improvement and stress management.

A well-trained certified health coach will guide clients in identifying their own personal health and wellness goals, and in determining the strategies they are willing and motivated to undertake to achieve those goals. A health coach helps clients discover why they want to make a change, works with the client to identify challenges to that change, and empowers and motivates clients to use their own knowledge and skills to generate an action plan to be successful in this pursuit.

Lifestyle Choices Make a Difference

Employees and principals are an organization's most important assets. Helping employees build a resilient personal immune system can help them better meet and resist health challenges. Such resilience will maximize their opportunity for the good health they want in life and to enjoy success in their work in the accounting profession.

Immune systems can be strengthened or weakened based on lifestyle choices, so to the extent possible we should try to be proactive in building our immune systems to facilitate and maintain good health. Good food, adequate exercise, quality sleep and stress management techniques all help.

An organization can help its employees with building their personal resiliency by providing opportunities that support their immunity enhancement.

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