

# ACCESS

## Does Your Marriage Need a Tune-up?

Think about your car. If you had it for years without ever changing your oil and checking your tires, would it still be running? Routine maintenance is common sense when it comes to automobiles. It's also the key to a lasting and fulfilling marital relationship.

"Regardless of whether you've been together for a few years or several decades, every relationship needs an occasional tune-up to help it run smoothly," suggests Ray Hoffmann, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The coordinator of outpatient behavioral health services at Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center, Hoffmann was the featured speaker at a recent Aurora EAP event entitled "Relationship Tune-Up," a program designed to help couples identify what works to develop a satisfying and successful relationship. His program—and frequently the professional therapy he offers couples in his practice—is based on the theories of Dr. John Gottman, a nationally-noted researcher and author on marital relationships. Hoffmann believes that Gottman's "Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work" really do work.

"So much of what makes a marriage successful is very ordinary communication," says Hoffmann. "It's about having a connection with



each other rather than simply living parallel lives. When couples are falling in love, they do all the right things," he explains. "They talk to each other about their personal lives, their dreams, their hopes for the future. They listen. They share, and they make time to be together."

That all comes naturally . . . when you're dating. When you've been married for awhile, such behaviors may require a more conscious effort. Hoffmann suggests that practicing "The Seven Principles" is a good way to get back to some of the basics of how you treated your partner when you first met. Following is a brief overview:

### **Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work**

#### **Enhance your love maps.**

In healthy relationships, couples are

intimately familiar with each other's world. They remember major events in each other's history, and they keep updating their information as the facts and feelings of their partner's world change. Gottman calls this having a "richly detailed love map," his term for the part of the brain where all the relevant information about your partner's life is stored. Explaining the significance of this principle, Hoffmann says, "The more couples know and understand each other, the easier it is to keep connected as life swirls around them."

#### **Nurture your fondness and admiration.**

What drew you to each other to begin with? People sometimes forget or take their partner's good qualities for granted. This principle is about acknowledging what you like about your spouse and your marriage and openly talking about it. Tell your partner, for example, that you really admire how hard he works at the factory, how much you enjoy her sense of humor, or how much you love the home you've built together. Learn to say, "I appreciate..."

#### **Turn toward each other instead of away.**

"For many couples, just realizing that they should not take their everyday interactions for granted can make an enormous difference," notes Hoffmann. At the breakfast table, for instance, it is not meaningless chatter

# How well did you sleep last night?

It's easy to take a good night's rest for granted. But for those who suffer from insomnia, a few hours' uninterrupted sleep is akin to a dream come true.

"Everyone has problems getting to sleep on occasion," says Brenda Reed, PsyD, a Milwaukee area sleep psychologist. "For some people, however, insomnia can be an ongoing issue that affects many aspects of life." On the job, sleep deprivation can lead to increased work errors, impaired concentration and memory, diminished reaction time, low energy and poor work performance. At home, it can impact the amount of stress on personal relationships, primarily due to the increased impatience, irritability and even the depression and anxiety that sometimes results from chronic insomnia. Day after day of insufficient sleep can also lead to the development of medical problems. A recent study published in the professional journal *Hypertension*, for example, reported an increased incidence of high blood pressure in middle-age people who regularly slept five hours or less a night. Lack of sleep can also lead to obesity due to a disruption of hormone production that regulates feelings of hunger.

Insomnia is defined by having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep throughout the night. Insomniacs may also find themselves waking up too early in the morning or waking up not feeling refreshed from sleep.

"Most insomnia is caused by some type of stress, often related to work, psychological issues or medical concerns," says Dr. Reed. "Once that stressor is gone, or the person is able to adapt to it, the insomnia should go away." Unfortunately, in some situations, people develop behavioral and thought patterns that perpetuate and worsen their insomnia. "They get into habits like staying in bed for longer periods when not sleeping, or begin believing that they are no longer in control of their sleep," Dr. Reed explains.



This can actually turn a temporary sleep problem into a chronic condition.

If you suffer from insomnia, you are not alone. Studies estimate that approximately one of every 10 adults experiences chronic sleep difficulties, and one of every two adults has significant insomnia at some time. Women are more prone to it than men. Advancing age also is a factor, with insomnia occurring more frequently among people age 60 and older.

There are several things you can do on your own to try to improve your sleep. Dr. Reed suggests the following:

## ***Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol late in the day.***

Many people believe a "night cap" will help them sleep. In reality, it may help you relax before going to bed, but it will probably cause restlessness and awakening throughout the night.

***Find relaxing activities to do before going to bed.*** Yoga, quiet reading or listening to soothing music, for example, may help your mind and body wind down.

## ***Don't stay in bed for long periods of time if you are not sleeping.***

Trying harder to fall asleep increases anxiety and makes it even more difficult to do so.

***Avoid naps.*** If you're too tired during the day because you didn't sleep the night before, napping will only temporarily correct the problem. And then it may "be" the problem.

***Exercise regularly.*** But try to get your workout in by early evening to avoid becoming energized too close to bed time.

***Create a comfortable sleep environment.*** Excessive warmth, lights shining through windows or doorways, pets in the bed and noise can all cause sleep disturbances.

***Maintain a consistent sleep schedule.*** Humans are naturally inclined to be creatures of habit. Irregular schedules often lead to irregular sleep.

*If lack of sleep continues to interfere with the quality of your life and relationships, you may want to seek professional help from your primary care physician or a nationally accredited sleep disorders center. You can also call the Aurora EAP at 1 (800) 236-3231. Further resources on insomnia can be found on the Aurora EAP's website at [www.Aurora.org/EAP](http://www.Aurora.org/EAP). Click on "For Employees of Client Companies."*

# Have a great, safe summer!

Summertime offers great opportunities for families to enjoy outdoor activities and travel. It also presents the increased risk of health and safety problems. With careful supervision and prevention however, 90% of summer's hazards can be avoided. Here are some tips:

## Sun

Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going outside. It should have a sun protective factor (SPF) of at least 15. Wear wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses. Keep babies younger than 6 months old out of direct sunlight.

## Water

Have your children take swimming lessons and wear a personal floatation device. Operate boats and jet skis with courtesy and common sense. Don't let children play around any water unless an adult is watching. Abstain from alcohol in, on or around the water.

## Sports

Reduce strenuous outdoor activities, especially in the heat of midday and during "ozone alerts." Drink plenty of water before, during and after physical activities including "just for fun" games like beach volleyball. Wear a helmet and other

safety gear when biking, skating, skateboarding, horseback riding, etc.

## Bugs

Don't leave food, drinks and garbage outside uncovered. Wear light-colored clothing and avoid scented lotions and perfume. Watch for allergic reactions to stings. Get victim to a hospital ER if there is swelling away from the sting, hives, itching, rash, difficulty breathing or shock. Use insect repellent with DEET to ward off mosquitoes and ticks, especially in areas known for Lyme disease. (Do not use DEET on babies.)



*For more summer safety tips, log on to the Aurora EAP website at [www.Aurora.org/EAP](http://www.Aurora.org/EAP). Click on "For Employees of Client Companies," enter your company password, and go to the "Work-Life Services" section.*

## Affordable fun for families

Americans love summer vacations! In fact, surveys show that 70 percent of families try to take a trip in June, July or August. But summer vacation doesn't have to involve the cost of traveling. With a little creative thinking and research, less expensive alternatives can be just as fun and possibly even more relaxing. Here are some ideas:

**Think like a tourist** in your own town. Call the visitor's bureau or chamber of commerce to find out what attractions they suggest to out-of-towners.

**Visit** the local museum, zoo, botanical gardens, parks and libraries. Find out if there is a "free day" where you can go without paying.

**Take advantage** of free tours offered by businesses like automotive plants, cheese factories and breweries, city fire and police stations, state capitol buildings, county courthouses or local hospitals.

**Search the internet** for college courses and camps for adults and kids. Participants can stay in dorms and eat on campus for far less than the cost of hotels and restaurants.

**Find out** if your park district offers free or inexpensive nature hikes, day trips, canoe rides, etc. Churches also often plan wholesome, affordable activities for people of all ages.

**Try camping** under the stars. National, state and county park rates are typically less than \$20/night. Rental stores, city park and recreation departments and private parties often rent camping equipment.

*If you are looking for additional support or opportunities for spending quality time as a family, please visit our website or contact your EAP at 1 (800) 236-3231 to request the assistance of an EAP counselor or work/life specialist.*

## *Does your marriage need a tune-up? (Continued from page 1)*

to comment on the bird you just saw out the window. “The minute details of life help people stay connected,” says Hoffmann.

### **Let your partner influence you.**

The happiest, most stable relationships are those where partners respect each other’s opinions and do not participate in power struggles. Men in traditional relationships, especially, can learn that “sharing power” and accepting their wife’s influence will heighten the positive aspects of the relationship by strengthening their friendship.

### **Solve your solvable problems.**

Don’t let problems linger on and on, advises Hoffmann. “Try to analyze the root of the problem, find ways to compromise and be tolerant of each other’s faults. These steps take very little ‘training’ because we all have problem solving skills. We just get out of the habit of using them in our most intimate relationships.”

### **Overcome gridlock.**

The goal in ending gridlock is not to solve the problem, but rather to move from gridlock to dialogue. Gridlock often is a sign that you have dreams in your life that are not being addressed or respected by each other. When dreams are hidden, they have the potential for fueling conflict. Hoffmann uses himself as an example. “When I was growing up, we didn’t have a lot of money so we always had old beater cars. As an adult, I used flimsy excuses to buy a new car every two years. My wife was frustrated by that, until I realized and shared with her my connection between having a nice car and a successful life.”

### **Create shared meaning.**

This principle accepts that couples don’t always see eye to eye on everything. Instead, there is “meshing,” says Hoffmann. “The culture you develop together incorporates both of your dreams.” This can be accomplished

through family rituals and traditions, shared symbols and setting and achieving personal goals together.

*In today’s society, it’s easy to get the impression that divorce is readily acceptable. In reality, most people truly want their marriage to last. That requires regular maintenance, and Gottman’s principles provide the tools you need to get to work. If you’d like additional help tuning up your marriage, please call your EAP at 1 (800) 236-3231.*

### **Recommended book:**

*The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*

Authors: John Gottman, Nan Silver

Publisher: Orion Publishing Company

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## *A few words from our director*

I feel grateful that the staff of the Aurora EAP has the opportunity to serve you and your families. We are proud to be able to assist you while you are dealing with some of life’s everyday challenges. I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge that we have also learned from each of you that we are better employees, better spouses, better parents and better friends because of your influence on us. Thank you for that!

To ensure that we continue to “stay on track” while attempting to support employees and their families, it would be helpful to hear from you regarding the enhancements we have made to this newsletter. Starting in 2006, we increased the size and scope of the newsletter to accommodate more topics and more lifestyle tips. We have gotten very positive feedback.

What topics are of most interest to you and your family? What information can we provide to assist you in living your life more fully? Just e-mail your responses to me at [cheryl.lipscomb@aurora.org](mailto:cheryl.lipscomb@aurora.org) and you will help us “continue to make a difference.”

I wish you and your family a healthy, happy, safe summer.

Thank you,



Cheryl Lipscomb

Director, Employee Assistance program

**Call your EAP at 1 (800) 236-3231**

[www.Aurora.org/EAP](http://www.Aurora.org/EAP)