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Deployment

You First!

posted on January 03, 2008 14:13 ★★★★★
 By Pamela M. McBride

If you were on a plane and the oxygen mask fell in front of you, what would you do? Assist every child within your reach? Move on to help the elderly couple in the next row, followed by the disabled person sitting across from them? Then, once you realize that you can't breathe, you might think about how many more people you would have been able to help if only you had put on your own oxygen mask first.

Figuratively, as women and military spouses, we do this far too often. We forget that in order to take care of others, we must take care of ourselves. We struggle with finding the time to recharge. Like the Energizer Bunny, we keep going and going and going. But that commercial is only a few seconds long, so we never see the batteries run out, but eventually, they do run out.

When dealing with deployment, it is critical that we don't let our own batteries run out; otherwise, we will have difficulty taking care of those who need us most. Taking care of ourselves is as simple as eating well, sleeping well, exercising and socializing. If you feel you don't have time to do any of this, you are not alone.

The National Sleep Foundation's 2007 Sleep in America Poll found that when pressed for time, one-half the women polled reported that sleep (52 percent) and exercise (48 percent) are the first things they sacrificed. Other healthy activities they put on the back burner were: spending time with friends and family and healthy eating. Interestingly enough, these are some of the very things that will help you cope with the everyday stressors in life and during deployment.

The fact of the matter is you, like me, probably need to be reminded of this often. So here are four items to add to the top of your daily to-do list during these potentially trying times.

1. SLEEP!

Although sleep experts recommend seven to nine hours per night for optimum performance, health and safety, they also agree that individuals must make sleep a priority. There is no science to figuring out how much sleep you need to be at your best, use a trial and error method. Just pay attention to how you feel with seven, eight and nine hours of sleep and get that much sleep as often as you can. To get the best sleep possible, stay away from activities that will get you wound up right before bedtime, like consuming caffeine, alcohol and sugar, as well as watching TV, finishing up those last chores, surfing the internet and exercising.

2. GET MOVING!

As difficult as it may seem to imagine, you will probably have a higher energy level each day if you exercise rather than if you don't. Actually, the increase in physical activity will also help you feel less stressed, and you'll sleep better at night (if you finish your workout at least three hours before bedtime). Whether you structure exercise into your day by taking early morning jogs, evening aerobics or midday walks, or you simply change a few of your habits, like take the stairs instead of the elevator or park farther from buildings, you will accomplish great strides in the way you feel. As a matter of fact, exercise may even be the catalyst to help you eat better! Since exercise will likely increase your appetite, all you have to do is make nutritious food choices to get even more of its benefits.

3. EAT WELL!

You've heard the saying that variety is the spice of life. That is especially true with eating. The best thing you can do when eating is to choose a variety of foods— grains, vegetables, fruit, oils, meat and beans, and milk. This not only means choosing from all foods groups, but from many sources within each group. Also, eat fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors —

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Whine!!! Advice wanted please
Tuesday's Whine and Cheese
Tomorrow will be a bittersweet day...
Needed to rant a little about the military
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military deployment, individual augmentation, tad, iraq

red, green, yellow, etc. — since they all have certain benefits. Finally, don't just get your protein from lean meats, but find it in beans, fish and nuts, too.

In case you didn't know, in 2005, the well-known food guide pyramid from the 1990s was replaced by MyPyramid. So, for a more personalized approach to making healthier food choices and a more active lifestyle, visit MyPyramid.gov.

4. SOCIALIZE!

It is easy to fall into a cycle of the same old daily routine, but don't get stuck in a rut.

Laugh, play and have plenty of fun!

There will be days when you just want to be alone, and that's OK. Just avoid limiting your social contact too much. It may not only decrease your potential level of support (People won't be able to notice how you are doing if they don't see you.), but it may also lead to depression, more time to worry and just all around feeling of the "blahs."

Coping with stress is far easier when you are surrounded by people who care and bring positive vibes into your life. When unexpected problems occur, the people who care will be the ones who help you come up with many more options for resolving problems than you would on your own.

Most importantly, get professional help if you need it. Whether through military, faith-based organizations or local agencies, have on-hand a plethora of resources that will get you through this difficult time.

The bottom line is something you've heard before: "Place the oxygen mask over your own nose and mouth, then breathe normally before you attempt to help others with theirs."

In other words — you first!

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