



**EMPLOYEE
BENEFITS**
health happenings

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Makoshika State Park near Glendive – Photo by Travel Montana

Conquering the Blah

The challenges of the past two years have come in many different forms, and no matter what you've experienced, there is an inevitable layer of additional stress ever-present in the background of our lives. Whether it's categorized as depression, burnout, sickness, emotional fatigue, or languishing — this constant crescendo and decrescendo of stress has led to difficult times for every single one of us, be it conscious or unconscious.

Heck, the #1 most read article in the NY Times for all of 2021 was Adam Grant's piece titled, "There's a Name for the Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing." People can obviously relate to the feeling Grant describes as "the void between depression and flourishing – the absence of well-being. You're not functioning at full capacity. Languishing dulls your motivation, disrupts your ability to focus, and triples the odds that you'll cut back on work."

We need to recognize that the same metrics and benchmarks for productivity, accomplishment and success are often not the same as they were before the pandemic. Embracing an attitude of grace, compassion and empathy for ourselves and others is crucial to maintaining a good head space in this unusual time. We need to make sure to keep

a healthy level of curiosity in our interactions with others—asking questions to maintain openness to their journey and current condition. You just never know when a person is masking their emotions and having a rough time.

The American Heart Association highlights the importance of practicing self-care. Their suggestions include carving out some alone time, talking with a friend, being okay saying "no," getting some fresh air, spending time with a pet and unplugging from electronics to truly recharge. Seems simple enough, right? The reality is that most of us aren't getting a lot of this kind of time. Binge-watching mindless TV or endlessly scrolling on our phone seems like a nice escape but can take us deeper into one of these unproductive and unhappy states of mind if we do it too much.

Grant suggests getting into a state of flow to combat languishing — giving yourself uninterrupted time to work on mindful mastery of any sort of task, preferably something joyful, that ideally makes a difference to others. He advocates "carving out daily time to focus on a challenge that matters to you—an interesting project, a worthwhile goal, a meaningful conversation." In a recent Ted Talk,

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Unraveling the Mystery of Low Vitamin D

By Laura Del Guerra, RD, CDE, Take Control Health Coach

Last summer during the annual wellness Health Screening, one of the tests included in the panel was the level of vitamin D in your blood. Following the Health Screenings, Take Control health coaches conducted Health Screening Review calls with MMIA plan members. During these calls, our health coaches noticed something interesting: most people we talked to had low vitamin D levels. This was surprising because it was the middle of the summer. The sun wasn't setting until after 11:00 pm, we were having hot and bright sunny days, so why did so many people have insufficient vitamin D levels?

I love a good mystery, so I set out to find answers. When reviewing the data, I found 49% of MMIA plan members who tested had either insufficient or deficient amounts of vitamin D. With this knowledge, I reached out to a Missoula dietitian who studies vitamin D. She suggested the extreme heat in Montana this past summer, combined with wildfire smoke, may have kept many of us inside rather than outside enjoying the Montana summer. In addition, sunscreen use, age, skin color, living in a northern state, certain GI conditions, and obesity can all affect the body's ability to absorb vitamin D.

Beyond sunshine, certain foods and vitamin D supplements can provide our bodies with additional vitamin D. This is great news if you drink a lot of milk, eat a lot of fatty fish and beef liver, or routinely take a daily vitamin D supplement containing more than 1000 IU. However, most of us get very little vitamin D from foods, and even fewer take a daily vitamin D supplement. Adequate vitamin D levels are important for a variety of reasons including:

- **Bone health:** Bone density decreases with age in adults. Studies have shown that supplements of both vitamin D and calcium result in small increases in bone density. Stronger bones help prevent osteoporosis and may help prevent fractures as we age.
- **Decreased risk of certain cancers:** Studies are underway to determine the possible

relationship between vitamin D supplementation and decreases in incidences of breast, colorectal, and prostate cancer. Clinical trials have shown a decrease in mortality rates in people with adequate to higher vitamin D levels.



- **Types I and II diabetes:** Inadequate vitamin D levels may increase the risk of developing type I and type II diabetes. Further, several small studies have shown that vitamin D supplementation has improved the ability of insulin to attach to glucose in the blood, resulting in lower blood glucose levels.
- **COVID-19:** Vitamin D plays an important role in reducing inflammation in the body. Studies are showing low vitamin D levels in patients with COVID cause more inflammation, and it could be a marker to show who is at increased risk for hospitalization. In addition, patients with low vitamin D levels upon hospital admission have an almost 4 times greater chance of dying from COVID and its complications.

According to the Harvard Medical School, most of us need vitamin D supplements to prevent insufficient or deficient levels in the blood. The amount varies, but the Endocrine Society recommends a supplement of 1500-2000 IU for people ages 19-50.

It used to be simple, get outside and get a "healthy" tan and your body will make all the vitamin D it needs. Desk jobs, sunscreen, wildfires, and higher-than-average temperatures have changed that. Advancing research is showing the importance of vitamin D, and its potential role in preventing many health problems. My recommendation is to drink low fat milk daily, eat fatty fish like salmon, trout and tuna, and take a daily vitamin D supplement. ■

he mentions that he was able to kick his personal languishing, from epic Mario Kart battles (of all things!) online with family that live in other states. The task itself doesn't have to be something remarkable, it just needs to get you into that flow mindset every day or couple of days.

No matter what your personal experience has been these past 24 months, the tribulations are different

than any of us have gone through before. Know that you're not alone. Adjust expectations and give yourself and others compassion as you explore ways to allow for daily self-care and get into a flow state. Hopefully this won't be the last time your Employee Benefits newsletter endorses more Mario Kart for your mental well-being! ■

Need to Talk? You've got Uprise Health!

As we often recommend, please don't forget to contact Uprise Health, our Employee Assistance Program if you're feeling blah, depressed, burnt out or that you're languishing. They provide six free counseling sessions per issue per year for each household member. They are a great resource to talk through whatever you're experiencing, even if it doesn't seem like it's a huge deal to you. ■



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5 Tips To Keep Your Chin Up



Do something impulsive.

Do something impulsive that you haven't planned every day. It's better to have no plan so we can seize the opportunities that may arise.



Have rituals.

We are less who we are than what we do. Do three things that you love every day. As a result, feeling fulfilled will help you sleep better. Better sleep helps you to be in a better mood. A better mood helps you to make better decisions.



Exercise at least 10 minutes a day.

Exercising has an influence on your brain, on your mood, on your ability to reflect and on your health.



Take breaks.

Prevent burnouts by stopping what you are doing and do something else. Create a different atmosphere, add some novelties in your daily routine.



Learn something new.

Learning helps to create new connections in your brain and to come up with new ideas and new opportunities.

