

Solutions *Provided by your Employee Assistance Program*

GOOD HEALTH AND HABITS ARE CONTAGIOUS

Your mother was right. Choose your friends and associates wisely as their choices have a profound effect on you for better and for worse.

And if you can't choose the people in your life (such as relatives and co-workers!) then at least be aware of the subtle yet powerful influence their moods and lifestyle may have on you.

BEYOND PEER PRESSURE

A new theory about the power of social networks takes the concept of peer pressure a step further. Researchers Nicholas Christakis, MD, and James Fowler, PhD, have found that:

- certain moods such as loneliness can be contagious
- people exhibit "flocking behavior" when it comes to things such as drinking, smoking and overeating

But don't despair—it's not just the bad habits that spread. Good moods and decisions to do things such as stop smoking are also contagious. According to Christakis and Fowler, if one person in a small firm stops smoking, his or her co-workers with the habit have a 34 percent chance of quitting as well.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

What's really "new" about this research is that it's not just your best friend who can influence your moods and choices, but anyone in your wider circle stretching out three degrees. That means that a friend of a friend of a friend's decision to stop smoking may influence you to stop smoking as information is shared along communication lines.

HOW TO BENEFIT FROM "NATURAL" SOCIAL NETWORKS

- **Make sure you have a strong social network.** Many studies show that people with friends and active social schedules live longer and enjoy better mental health.



- **Ask for advice.** Always wondered how a co-worker stays slim? People love to share their stories.
- **Exercise with friends.** Working out with a friend gives you a burst of endorphins similar to the "high" experienced when laughing or dancing with others, according to research. You're also more likely to stick to an exercise program if you do it with a friend.
- **Notice your habits and moods** and try to understand their influences. Gravitate toward those who instill healthy habits. Avoid negative people who consistently bring you down.
- **Plan substitute activities for problem behaviors** such as smoking or overeating. Instead of a group smoke break, take a walk with someone. Bring fruit to a meeting instead of doughnuts.
- **Pick up a new hobby** or take classes as a way to make new friends.
- **Celebrate lifestyle improvements** with others.
- Remember that **your choices also have an effect on others.**



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TEACHING TEXTING SAFETY TO YOUR CHILDREN

If there's one lesson that children need to know about texting, it is that no text or picture is private once it's sent. Not only can it be passed along to countless strangers, via other phones or the Internet, but you can never be sure it won't turn up again.

As kids get older, the message needs to be more explicit. Never, for instance, send a picture of yourself or anyone else using drugs or alcohol.

SET LIMITS

Parents can help protect their children by setting rules for when and where cell phones are to be used. Parents can prevent use of cell phones at night by insisting that the phones be charged overnight outside the child's room. Parents are also advised to know all the passwords on their child's mobile device.

LEARN TO TEXT

To keep their children safe, parents should communicate with them early and often. Learning to communicate in the kids' own medium by learning to text can make it easier.



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2. Managing a Chronic Illness
3. Taking Charge of Your Health Care
4. Your Social Network and Your Health
5. Teaching Your Child About Internet Safety and Communication



IS DEPRESSION CONTAGIOUS?

Depression is not "caught" by infection, like the flu. But if you're around angry, sad or fearful people, you may start feeling the same way.

KEEP SOMEONE ELSE'S MOOD FROM HIJACKING YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Set boundaries. "A lot of people will talk incessantly about their bad situation," says life coach and author Debbie Mandell. "Try to change the subject or assert yourself, nicely."

Seek positive friends. "We're so focused on what we eat but not careful about who we hang out with," Mandell adds.

Prepare for bad times. You *will* face problems in your life. Determine what coping tools work for you, then stock your emotional-health arsenal.

Be careful what you think about. Don't exaggerate small problems. Think positively.

Get physical. Exercise. The simplest way to reset your mood is to take a walk.

Don't take another person's ups and downs personally. It's not about you.

Don't badger. Be patient. If a depressed person asks for help, give it. Put a key in the lock, but let him or her open the door.

Knowledge is power. "Depression can sap the energy and enthusiasm for a fulfilling life out of anyone living with or regularly interacting with a depressed person," says therapist Joe Wegmann, PD, LCSW, pharmacist and licensed social worker. "Family and friends can empower themselves by understanding this disorder, and getting their own needs met."

Live well. Follow a healthy diet. Get enough sleep.

Do something. Go to a movie, spend time with friends. Have fun and be glad you are able to enjoy life.

