Thrive
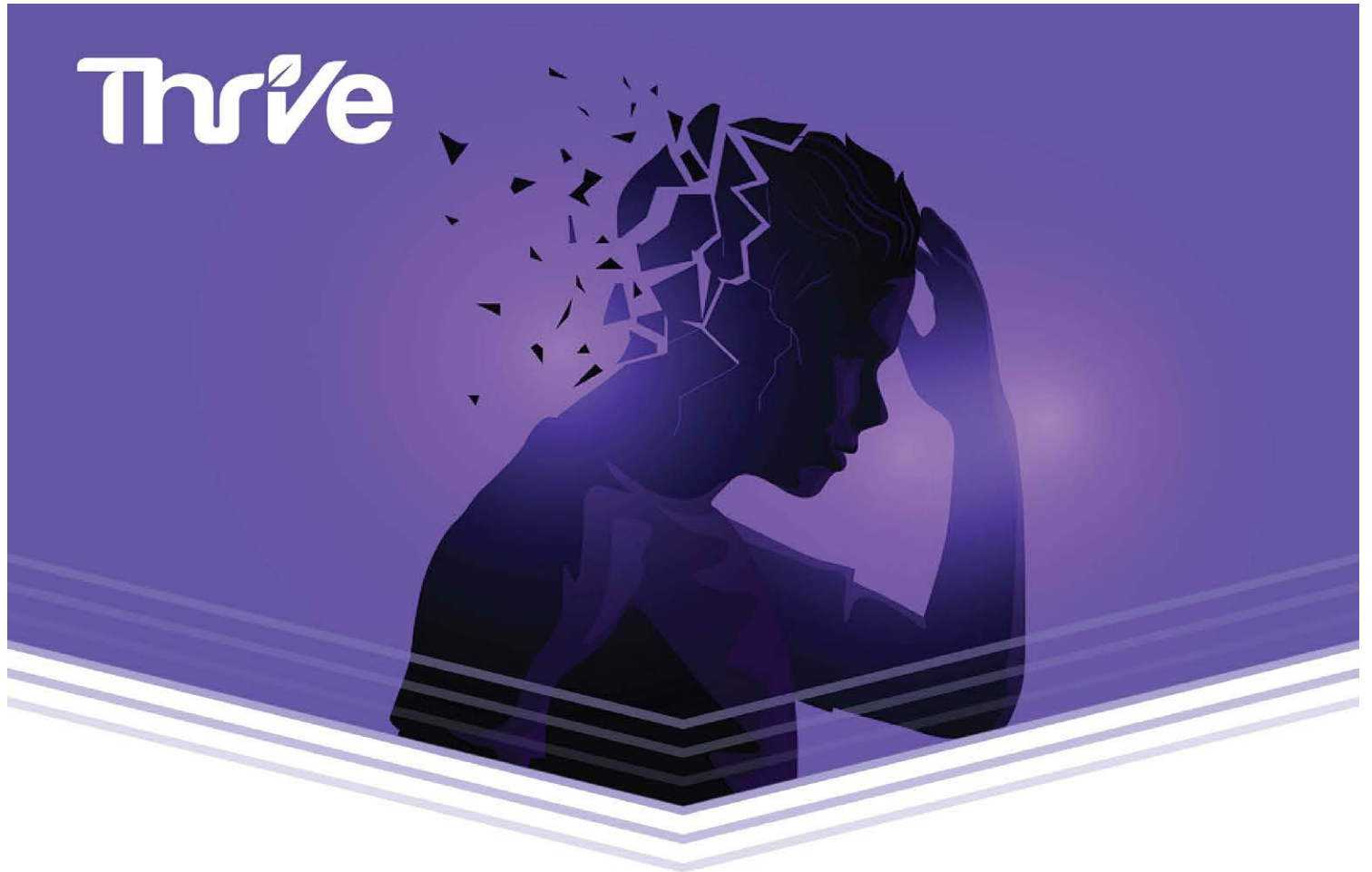
STRESS
AWARENESS
Month

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Celebrate Stress Awareness Month at your office.

Give yourself 10 minutes per day.

Try positive thinking.

LET'S DO THIS!

Over the past 30 years, the number of Americans who are stressed has been on a steady incline after a sharp drop in 2003. The most recent data shows that nearly half of all Americans, 49%, report frequently experiencing stress, up 16 points over the past two decades and the highest in Gallup's trend to date.

(Source: https://news.gallup.com/poll/642704/americans-sleeping-less-stressed.aspx)

Since this month is National Stress Awareness Month, we came up with some ideas you could try for a week or for National Stress Awareness Day on April 16, which happens to be the day after tax day. I hope these activities are helpful and that employees will have a chance to experience some stress relief and learn some tips for managing stress in their lives.

SET ASIDE A ROOM FOR A WEEK TO BE USED FOR DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES.

1. Art therapy, such as doodling with your nondominant hand or coloring with crayons or colored pencils.

2. Mindfulness activities with instructions on how to do them.

3. Have a computer set up with links to funny videos or ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) relaxation videos.

4. Bring in a massage therapist for a day to do chair massages.

5. Create a Zen place with aromatherapy, using essential oils and relaxing music.

6. Office/desk yoga with instructions or videos.

7. Place a gratitude journal for everyone to write down their positive thoughts.

APRIL 16 IS NATIONAL STRESS AWARENESS DAY

- Host a guest speaker.

- Learn about yourself; take assessments that measure stress.

- Have office snacks and a potluck with foods that help with stress (include chocolate).

- Everybody take a walk break at different times.

- Everyone do a random act of kindness for someone in the office.

OUR THOUGHTS CONTRIBUTE TO STRESS

According to Mayo Clinic, optimism and pessimism can affect many areas of health and well-being. Dr. Daniel Amen states that positive and negative thoughts release chemicals in the brain that affect your feelings and reactions. Just like optimistic thoughts result in happiness and well-being, negative thinking causes feelings of sadness, anger, depression and illness. Below are some tips on how to change from negative to positive thinking.

IDENTIFY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Filtering. You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones. You ignore compliments on your work, and you still think you need to do more.

Personalizing. When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself. For example, you hear that an evening out with friends is canceled, and you assume that the change in plans is because no one wanted to be around you.

Catastrophizing. You automatically anticipate the worst. The drive-through coffee shop gets your order wrong and you automatically think the rest of your day will be a disaster.

Polarizing. You see things only as either good or bad. There is no middle ground. You feel that you have to be perfect or you're a total failure.

FOCUS ON POSITIVE THINKING

Identify areas to change. Identify areas of your life that you usually think negatively about, whether these thoughts are about work, your daily commute or a relationship. You can start small by focusing on one area to approach in a more positive way.

Check yourself. Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.

Be open to humor. Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times. Seek humor in everyday happenings. When you can laugh at life, you feel less stressed.

Follow a healthy lifestyle. Aim to exercise for about 30 minutes on most days of the week. You can also break it up into 10-minute chunks of time during the day. Exercise can positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet to fuel your mind and body, and learn techniques to manage stress.

Surround yourself with positive people. Make sure those in your life are positive, supportive people you can depend on for helpful advice and feedback. Negative people may increase your stress level and make you doubt your ability to manage stress in healthy ways.

Practice positive self-talk. Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about you. Think about things you are thankful for in your life.

EXAMPLES OF PUTTING A POSITIVE TWIST TO NEGATIVE THOUGHTS:

NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
I've never done it before.	It's an opportunity to learn something new.
It's too complicated.	I'll tackle it from a different angle.
I don't have the resources.	Necessity is the mother of invention.
I'm too lazy to get this done.	I wasn't able to fit it into my schedule, but I can re-examine some priorities.
There's no way it will work.	I can try to make it work.
It's too radical a change.	I can take a chance.
No one bothers to communicate with me.	I'll see if I can open the channels of communication.
I'm not going to get any better at this.	I'll give it another try.

When we think positively, we are better able to handle everyday stress in more constructive ways, resulting in much better health and well-being.

RESOURCES

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksB0IXhM-Vc
https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/positive-thinking/art-20043950