HEALTHY STRATEGIES FOR VETERINARY WELLBEING

Dr. Elizabeth B. Strand, LCSW • Director, Veterinary Social Work • University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine

PRACTICE IDEAS

1. **De-Stress**
   If you find your team feeling worn out or stressed due to a hard week, you might consider holding a “De-Stress” Meeting. Use these six questions to discuss and release the week!
   - What are the situations this week that made it hard to sleep or put aside thoughts of work when you were at home?
   - What did you do well in that situation?
   - What do you wish you had done differently?
   - What did you learn?
   - Is there anything you are grateful for in this situation, or just in general?
   - Is there anything that was humorous about this situation or in this week that you remember?

2. **Take Healthy Breaks**
   Create a play/exercise space for use by staff to take healthy breaks. Get ideas from staff about what to put in the space!

3. **Inspire**
   Post inspiring quotations and images around the office. Invite a staff member to take leadership for gathering and posting uplifting words and positive social media reviews.

4. **Learn**
   Encourage the team to take crisis intervention training such as Question Persuade Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention Training. This will help everyone feel prepared for helping others in times of emotional crisis.

5. **Connect**
   Use a mental health professional to meet periodically with the team with opportunity for individual appointments. Provide a list of local mental health resources for the team.

---

1 [https://www.aaha.org/professional/resources/veterinary_practice_team_wellbeing_chapter_5.aspx](https://www.aaha.org/professional/resources/veterinary_practice_team_wellbeing_chapter_5.aspx)
2 [https://avma.org/qpr](https://avma.org/qpr)
3 [https://www.aaha.org/public_documents/professional/resources/humansupport.pdf](https://www.aaha.org/public_documents/professional/resources/humansupport.pdf)
4 [https://www.fitnessblender.com/](https://www.fitnessblender.com/)
9 [https://insighttimer.com/meditation-timer](https://insighttimer.com/meditation-timer)
10 [https://www.psychologytoday.com/us](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us)
Getting enough vitamin D is important for physical and mental health. Consider talking with your doctor to assess if your vitamin D levels are in the healthy range.

"Veggies, fruits, and nuts, Oh My!" – Eating plenty of fruits and veggies can increase your happiness as much as going from being unemployed to finding a new job! Moreover, having a handful of nuts each day is associated with less disease and 28% improvement in mood!

Celebrate Others

“When you see a co-worker doing something for their wellbeing, take a moment to say, ‘Good job!’ It’s hard to engage in self-care behavior. Think about how you would feel if someone told you, ‘Good job!’ when leaving work on time to catch a Zumba class.

Stop Beating Yourself Up

When you are facing something tough, practice self-compassion by talking to yourself as you would a good friend in the same situation. You can use the De-Stress questions above personally by writing answers in a journal or talking over answers with a trusted friend.

Have a Plan

Create a documented stress management plan. In the plan, consider committing to engaging in at least one of these behaviors daily.

- Working out doesn’t have to take a long time to help with physical and mental health. Try 5-7 minutes of High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT). Better yet, do it with a buddy!
- Try the 4-7-8 breathing technique to help yourself calm down during the day or fall back asleep at night. Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts, hold your breath for 7 counts, and breathe out through your mouth for 8 counts… and repeat.
- Eat yogurt – getting enough probiotics in your diet can help your central nervous system manage stress!
- “Veggies, fruits, and nuts, Oh My!” – Eating plenty of fruits and veggies can increase your happiness as much as going from being unemployed to finding a new job! Moreover, having a handful of nuts each day is associated with less disease and 28% improvement in mood!
- Getting enough vitamin D is important for physical and mental health. Consider talking with your doctor to assess if your vitamin D levels are in the healthy range.

Be Mindful

Practice 5 minutes of mindfulness.

- Sit in a chair or cross-legged on the floor with your back straight. If on the floor, sit on a pillow to raise your hips off the floor.
- Breath in, and as you breath out, count “one.”
- Count your breaths out until you reach “five.”
- Start again.
- If you get to “ten” you will know your mind has wandered. That is OK and expected. Just start again.
- Consider downloading the app, “Insight Timer.” It’s free with many resources for learning to practice mindfulness.

Be Grateful

Consider keeping a gratitude journal. Writing down three things you are grateful for each day can reduce depression and increase happiness.

Talk With Someone

It’s good to talk with a professional about areas in your life that hurt or feel stuck. Seek help from a mental health professional when needed! If you are having a mental health emergency:

- Contact National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255.
- Text “HELLO” to 741741 for the Crisis Text Line and a live trained counselor will respond.
- Or look up “Mobile Crisis Unit” in your county or region for support.