

# 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!<sup>1</sup>

- ✓ 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [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)

<sup>2</sup> <https://avma.org/qpr>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.aaha.org/public\\_documents/professional/resources/humansupport.pdf](https://www.aaha.org/public_documents/professional/resources/humansupport.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fitnessblender.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/11/161121160038.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-happiness-fruits-vegetables/could-fruit-and-veg-boost-happiness-idUSKCN0ZV267>

<sup>7</sup> <http://time.com/4589365/tree-nuts-peanuts-heart-disease/>

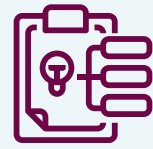
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.spring.org.uk/2016/11/nut-improve-mood.php>

<sup>9</sup> <https://insighttimer.com/meditation-timer>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>



## IDEAS FOR INDIVIDUALS



### 1. 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)<sup>4</sup>. 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. Breath in through your nose for 4 counts, hold your breath for 7 counts, and breath 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!<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ "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!<sup>6</sup> Moreover, having a handful of nuts each day is associated with less disease<sup>7</sup> and 28% improvement in mood!<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ 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.

### 2. 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.

### 3. 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.<sup>9</sup>

### 4. Be Grateful

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



### 5. 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.

### 6. 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!<sup>10</sup> 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.

