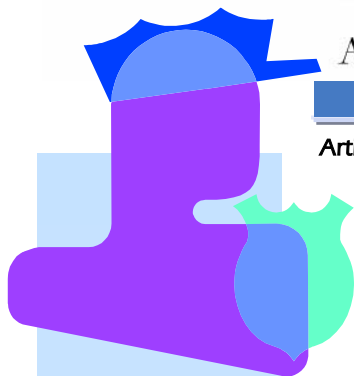


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## Eating & Living for a Healthy Heart

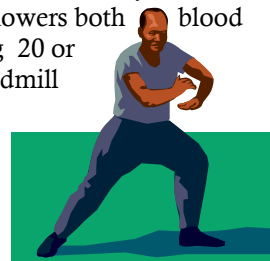
Individuals in dangerous professions, such as soldiers in active combat, police officers, and fire-fighters, have a two times greater risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke than the general population according to a recent public health study. Recent studies identify occupational stress such as office politics, shift work that affects dietary and exercise habits, consumption of high fat “fast food” meals between high stress activities, smoking that increases the risk of blood clots and arterial plaque, sleep deprivation, excessive use of alcohol, and the lack of meaningful exercise as the top issues contributing to the higher rates of heart disease in the above professions. While this news seems depressing, *the good news is that there are several steps you can take right now to decrease your risk substantially!*



### Tips for a Healthy Heart

Even if you are only able to make one or two changes from the following suggestions, you will be heading in the right direction. Here are a few suggestions. Stay tuned for more in our next newsletter

- ♥ Research shows that more than 80% of heart disease can be prevented by eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising daily, not smoking and drinking alcohol in moderation. (Harvard Medical School, 2007)
- ♥ Exercise consistently! I emphasize the consistency as studies show that exercising 3 times a week lowers both blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Doing 20 or more minutes on the Lifecycle or treadmill (aerobic activity) combined with a weightlifting program is preferred. Also find the time to add in occasional walking (using stairs, walking to the bank, parking away from destination, etc.). This is the most important first step!
- ♥ Get serious about high cholesterol/triglycerides and high blood pressure! Treating these two risk factors are key in lowering your risk! Schedule an appointment with your doctor to discuss treatment options.
- ♥ Stop smoking or chewing tobacco. It raises homocystine, a dangerous risk factor for heart disease. Each year, 443,000 people die prematurely because of smoking!
- ♥ Take up the martial art of Tai Chi. Numerous studies have been done to confirm that doing Tai Chi 2 to 3 times a week can significantly improve your health while reducing stress and anxiety. The goal is to find an activity that slows down your thinking while similarly producing relaxation and physical effects.



## Police Officers & Sleep Deprivation

Sleep problems are alarmingly prevalent in police officers and this has implications on your health, your immune functions and your ability to perform well during the day. A recent Harvard Medical School report revealed that nearly 40% of the 5,296 active duty officers who participated in the study were found suffering from sleep abnormalities. These included apnea, insomnia, shift work disorders, restless leg syndrome and narcolepsy.

While shift work and exposure to critical incidents contribute to insomnia the majority of sleep complaints experienced by police officers are due more to work environment issues, like day to day hassles with supervisors, excessive overtime, and dealing with the court system and less so to exposure to critical incidents.

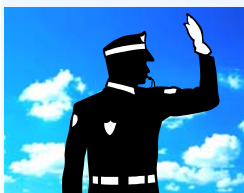
Lack of sleep can lead to “dozing” off during daytime activities, driving drowsy, trouble with concentration and memory, a “shorter fuse” which increases the liability for the officer and the department. Studies also show an increased mortality rate for these officers reporting less than six hours of sleep per night.

Similar studies also confirm that individuals who consistently get less than 6 hours of sleep per day have a higher mortality rate! One study alarmingly revealed that sleep loss is a greater mortality risk factor than high blood pressure, smoking and heart disease.

New research also reveals that up to 25% of men suffer from sleep apnea.

*(Continued on page 2)*

Reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you or one of your family members are in need of mental health or substance abuse treatment, contact one of your peer support counselors or give us a call at 235-7120 for a confidential consultation. We are available 24 hrs. a day/7 days per week.



*Peer support counselors are specially trained police officers who provide support and assistance to colleagues during personal and professional crisis.*

# Training Police Officers Throughout New England



**NRI Community Services** is an accredited, progressive, non-profit, community agency providing mental health, substance abuse, and elder case management, education and training, employment, and housing services. NRICS has received national recognition for many of its programs based on client outcomes.

[www.NRICommunityServices.org](http://www.NRICommunityServices.org)

(Continued from page 1)

Sleep apnea is a serious condition whereby the officer actually stops breathing while sleeping. These small periods of cessation of breathing puts incredible strain on the heart and blood vessels which if not detected and treated can lead to high blood pressure, stroke and heart attack.

Warning signs of sleep apnea are as follows:

- ✓ Choking or gasping for air while sleeping. This is usually noticed by your bed partner who also wakes up with these episodes
- ✓ Loud snoring. Chronic snoring is associated with an increased incident of heart and brain related disorders (WebMD)
- ✓ Abruptly waking up to having difficulty breathing
- ✓ Daytime sleepiness such as falling asleep at work, in a movie theatre, at dinner or while driving home
- ✓ Having low energy and feeling fatigued in the AM
- ✓ Experiencing early morning headaches
- ✓ Periods of "micro sleep" which are brief periods of falling asleep during the day
- ✓ Excessive sweating during sleep
- ✓ Increased urination at night
- ✓ Heartburn



If you have any of the above symptoms do not take them lightly as they **may be life threatening** if not treated. Please take a few moments to take the Epworth sleepiness scale. A score greater than 10 warrants a call to your doctor. Go to the American Sleep Apnea Association web site for more information on sleep apnea at [www.sleepapnea.org](http://www.sleepapnea.org).

So, if you are currently experiencing insomnia/fatigue or are interested in possible ways of preventing it in the future, the following list of suggestions and techniques may help in promoting sleep and reducing stress.

## Tips for Improving Sleep

- ♥ Take naps! Naps can rejuvenate both your brain and body. As little as a 10 minute nap can improve mood, concentration, reaction time and decision making. Naps can be taken while on break, not while on duty due to officer safety concerns.
- ♥ If you are unable to fall asleep, get up and go into another room. Stay up as long as you wish, preferably engaged in a boring activity. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy. Although you should not watch the clock, the goal is to fall asleep quickly; if you are in bed for more than 10 minutes without falling asleep, you should get out of bed. If you find yourself looking at the clock at night, turn it so that you cannot see it or cover it up.
- ♥ Herbs and/or natural substance such as melatonin, valerian, and/or chamomile can promote sleep in some individuals. You can purchase these at any health food store or phar-

- macy. If you are on prescription medication, consult your MD or pharmacist before taking.
- ♥ Avoid caffeine, tobacco, cheese, chocolate, wine, bacon, ham, and sugar before bedtime. These foods contain tyramine, which increases a brain chemical which acts as a stimulant, drink lots of water.
- ♥ Go to bed at the same time every night.
- ♥ Avoid alcohol at night as it causes multiple awakenings.
- ♥ Try a light snack before bedtime. Foods high in tryptophan produce sleep (turkey, bananas, tuna, yogurt, whole grain crackers).
- ♥ Use the bedroom for sleep and intimacy, not as a TV room.
- ♥ Take a warm shower.
- ♥ Purchase sleep enhancing tapes such as the sounds of the ocean, wilderness, thunder, rain etc. These can be

- bought at Borders, Target, the Mall, etc. While you are at Borders, pick up a book on relaxation and stress reduction.
- ♥ Exercise aerobically at least 3 times a week. Examples are running, biking, and swimming. Avoid exercising at night prior to sleep.
- ♥ Drink plenty of water, but avoid drinking excessively prior to bedtime.
- ♥ Find a non-law enforcement hobby, such as woodworking, auto repair, coaching, martial arts, tai-chi, playing a musical instrument.
- ♥ Use naps to help you get "caught up" when you haven't gotten enough sleep.
- ♥ Pick up the following books "Tired Cops" by Brian Vila, 1-888-202-4563 and "Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement," Gilmartin, [emotionalsurvival.com](http://emotionalsurvival.com)
- ♥ And lastly, watch the overtime!



## Epworth Sleepiness Scale

In contrast to just feeling tired, how likely are you to just doze off or fall asleep in the following situations? (Even if you have not done some of the things recently, try to work out how they would have affected you.) Use the following scale to choose the most appropriate number for each situation.

- 0 = Would never doze
- 1 = Slight chance of dozing
- 2 = Moderate chance of dozing
- 3 = High chance of dozing

- Sitting and Reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Watching TV \_\_\_\_\_
- Sitting inactive in a public place (i.e. theatre) \_\_\_\_\_
- As a car passenger for an hour without a break \_\_\_\_\_
- Lying down to rest in the afternoon \_\_\_\_\_
- Sitting and talking to someone \_\_\_\_\_
- Sitting quietly after lunch without alcohol \_\_\_\_\_
- In a car, while stopping for a few minutes in traffic \_\_\_\_\_

**A score of greater than 10 is a definite cause for concern as it indicates significant excessive daytime sleepiness.**

*(Nebraska Rural Health and Safety Coalition)*