

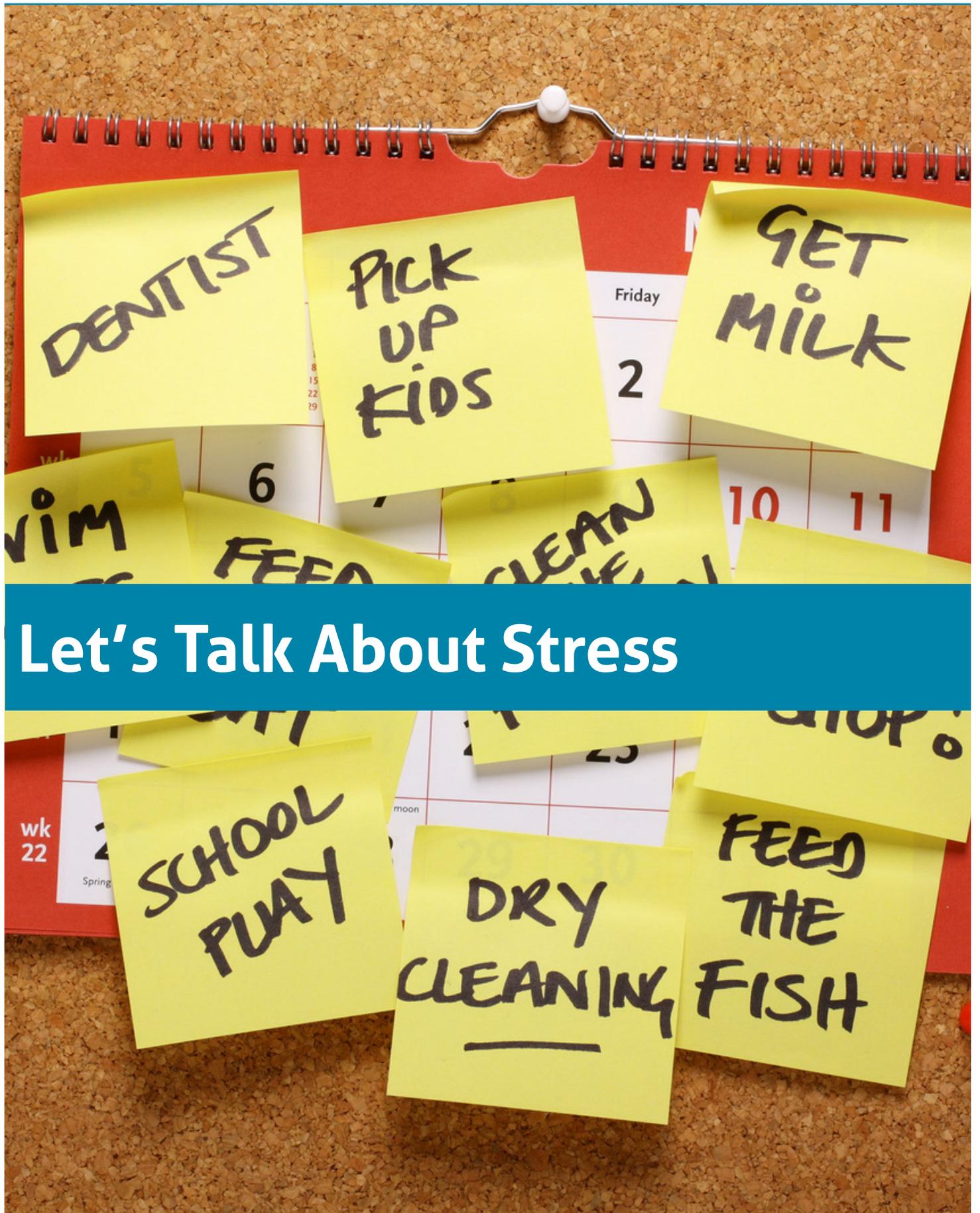


Mental Fitness Keeps Our Minds Strong

Mental health improves our ability to manage the natural ups and downs of life, to enjoy daily activities and the people around us, and to make good life choices. Mental wellness also improves our physical health. Studies show that people with untreated mental health problems visit a medical doctor twice as often as people who address their mental health challenges.¹

In this Mental Health Kit, we explore a variety of topics to get you thinking about your mental fitness and help you understand some of the characteristics that make up good mental health.





Let's Talk About Stress

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Getting a grip on stress before it gets the better of you is a good preventive strategy for maintaining positive mental health.

Stress is the negative mental or emotional strain that your body exhibits in response to various physical, environmental, emotional, or chemical factors. Stress is unavoidable, and it results not only from major life events, but also from the basic challenges of everyday life; the pressure to perform well at work or school, to manage time and finances, and to make time for family and friends.

While stress can sometimes be a good motivator for getting things done, too much stress can be detrimental to your well-being. Ongoing stress results in high levels of stress hormones that can disrupt your body's processes, weaken your immune system, and make you more susceptible to mental and physical illness.

What can you do about stress?

Be proactive

When you start feeling stressed or anxious, acknowledge and accept it. Take a break and engage in activities that help your natural relaxation response kick-in, like going for a walk or taking a few deep breaths.

Identify your triggers

What makes you feel stressed out? Keep a list of the situations (or the people) causing you stress. Consider whether or not you can minimize exposure to these triggers or how you can change your interactions. For example, if your weekly trip to three different grocery stores is stressing you out, try going to just one or two and see if that makes a positive difference.

Change your response

If you are experiencing unhealthy reactions to stress, such as pain, anger, negativity, or overeating, it's time to make some changes. Keep a journal to monitor your reactions to stressful situations and try using stress-relief methods that will help you to redirect those stress responses in the future – for example, deep breathing, meditation, or journaling.

Build your toolkit

Stress management skills don't always come naturally. What works for one person may not work for the next, so take some time to explore different techniques and identify what works best for you. You can find a range of stress management tools and suggestions through your Assistance Program at homeweb.ca.



Good Habits for Mental Health

Six Healthy Habits to Boost Mental Health and Resilience

You can boost your well-being and better prepare yourself to face life's challenges by actively practicing behaviours, thoughts, and habits that build your mental stamina.

We will all be faced with situations that challenge our mental well-being, but research shows that we can improve our mental and emotional strength in the same way that we can develop our physical strength.

Here are a few healthy habits that will help to improve your resilience and keep your mind healthy:

- 1. Pursue your hobbies.** Even if you love your job, it's important to set aside time for other interests and hobbies to keep you grounded outside of the workplace. Engage your mind in creative activities like photography, writing, painting, dancing, or music. Taking time for the little pleasures in life can bring great comfort.
- 2. Stay connected.** Nurture healthy relationships with the people who enrich your life. Make time for family and friends, build a strong support network, and be there to offer support to others. The quality of our personal relationships has a significant impact on our well-being.
- 3. Take care of yourself.** It sounds like a no-brainer, but when the going gets tough, we tend to neglect our health. Physical and mental health are closely linked – if your body feels good, you will feel good. Stay active and eat a balanced diet. Get plenty of sleep, and allow yourself some time each day to relax your mind.
- 4. Challenge yourself.** Learning improves your mental fitness and helps you build agile thinking skills to better cope with unexpected situations. Consider learning a new skill or taking on a challenge, such as committing to a fitness goal, learning a new language, or taking a cooking class. Not only will you come away with new talents, but you'll also have a sense of achievement.
- 5. Manage your time.** A busy schedule can be a good thing if you know how to manage your time effectively. Set priorities, and make time for what you love. Use technology to your advantage; there are plenty of time management apps and resources available online. Being organized will help you to avoid stress.
- 6. Help your community.** Volunteer your time to help a neighbour or support a cause. Contributing to the betterment of your community is rewarding and will keep you connected to your environment, give you a sense of belonging, and empower you to make a difference. Improving the lives of others will also improve your life.



Nature and Mental Health



Using Nature to Nurture Mental Health

Spring is the perfect time to get outside and connect with the natural world.

Nature stimulates the senses and promotes a sense of wellness. Plants thrive with nourishment, warmth, and care – and so do their caregivers!

Horticultural activities, such as gardening and indoor planting, provide meaningful and therapeutic ways to learn about self-nurturing and to create awareness of the living, external environment.

Horticultural therapy has proven effective for reducing anxiety and stress, stimulating positive thoughts, and promoting self-esteem. Gardening is also an excellent way to get creative and stay active.

Many plants have therapeutic properties. Here are three plants with functional qualities that you might want to try growing this spring:



Mint

- Refreshing smell ideal for sensory stimulation
- Cools the body and aids in digestion
- Bonus: has many culinary uses



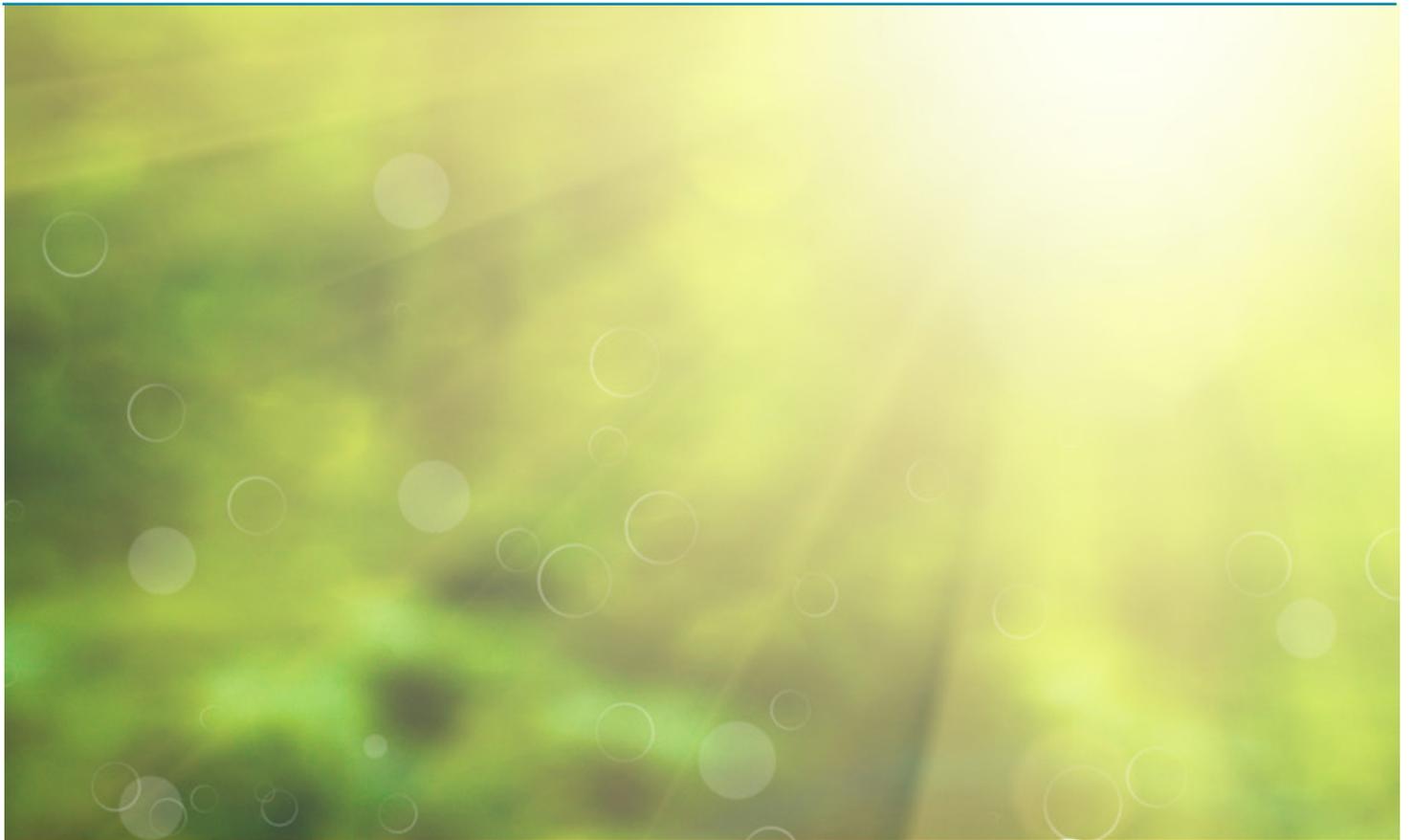
Dwarf Orange Tree

- Orange blossoms have a calming, relaxing scent (neroli)
- Smell of citrus stimulates memory
- Bonus: fruit can be used for jam

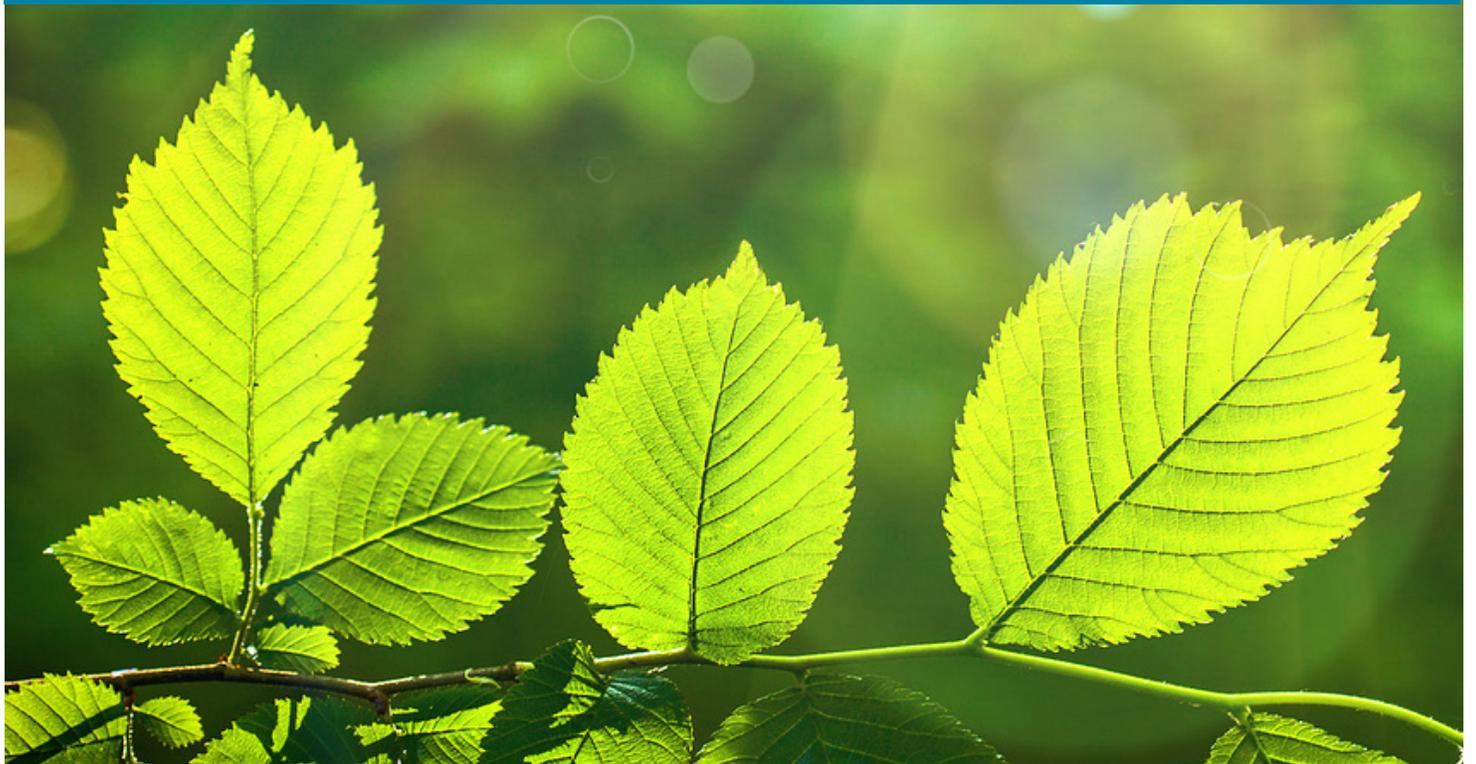


Lavender

- Fragrance helps to promote sleep and relaxation
- Scent stimulates the limbic system
- Bonus: when used in bath water, relieves muscular pain



In Focus: Suicide Awareness



Suicide Awareness: Fact vs. Myth



Suicide can be an uncomfortable topic of discussion, but the more knowledgeable we are about suicide, the more we are able to support others in distress. Let's talk about it.

MYTH: *Talking about suicide will increase the risk of someone making a suicide attempt.*

FACT: Talking openly about suicide, without shock or judgment, will convey your genuine concern and serve as an immediate intervention.

MYTH: *People who attempt suicide will continue to be unwell and suicidal.*

FACT: This type of thinking perpetuates stigma. The truth is that many individuals who have attempted suicide can make a full recovery with the proper care and support.

MYTH: *Suicide isn't common; very few people actually follow through with it.*

FACT: Suicide claims thousands of lives each year. In the United States, there is one death by suicide every 13 minutes.² In Canada, suicide is ranked as the ninth leading cause of death.³

MYTH: *Suicide is more common among low-income individuals.*

FACT: Suicide shows no prejudice to economic status; it crosses all socio-economic boundaries.

Suicide and the Workplace

The workplace plays a key role in our physical, emotional, and psychological well-being; a working person spends more waking hours at work than anywhere else during the day.

Co-workers are often the first people to recognize the signs that something may be wrong or that an individual is experiencing mental health problems.

Signs that your co-worker may be experiencing distress:

- Seems to be much more withdrawn or sociable than usual
- Looks worn out or in a daze
- Shows up late, calls in sick frequently, or fails to meet work deadlines
- Is experiencing a difficult situation but seems to be out of touch with reality
- Seems overcome with sadness or despair (cries, seems to be 'elsewhere', ruminates)
- Talks about not being able to do anything about a difficult situation, or says there is 'no way out'
- Is more irritable than usual

Signs that your co-worker may be at risk of suicide:

- Makes references to having found a solution, or talks about how everything will be settled soon and they won't be bothering people anymore
- Talks directly, or indirectly, about suicidal thoughts
- Suddenly seems happier or carefree, after having gone through a period of despair
- Is suddenly generous, paying off debts, or giving away possessions to co-workers and friends

What can you do?

Start the conversation. If you're concerned about someone's well-being, check in with them. Ask honest questions like, "I get the feeling that something's on your mind. Are you OK?", or "You really don't seem like yourself, and I'm concerned. Is everything OK?"

Listen without judgment. Having someone to talk to is very important and can help keep people safe. Never ridicule the person you're talking to, don't make them feel guilty, and do not try to fix the problem. The best way to help is to make the person feel understood, so that they know they are not alone.

Encourage professional help. Let the person know that you care about their well-being and encourage them to connect with a professional for help. Let them know that their Assistance Program offers confidential support and is available 24/7/365.

If your friend, family member, or co-worker refuses help, but you are concerned for their safety, call your assistance program for expert advice.



Mental Health Break

Take a Quick Mental Health Break



Taking time to replenish and re-energize during the day can be one of the most effective tools for managing stress. Even a small investment of time for relaxation can have a big payoff and allow you to refocus and be more productive.

This simple, three-step breathing exercise is a handy tool to help you manage stress and maintain a healthy, positive attitude. Bonus: you can do it anywhere, anytime!

Deep Breathing Exercise

1. Count to five while taking a long, slow breath. Inhale through your nose, allowing your diaphragm to fill with air and your chest to expand. Hold the breath for five seconds.
2. Exhale the air slowly through your mouth as you count to five.
3. Repeat this three times, doing your best to clear your head of all thoughts, plans, and worries.

By breathing deeply for at least ten seconds, you signal your brain to switch from stress mode to relaxation mode, giving your body and mind a break.

About Homewood Health

Homewood Health offers the highest quality of clinical support and intervention available within the EFAP industry, and an unmatched continuum of services — spanning health promotion, mental health and addictions support, and prevention-focused work-life balance services.

Contact us

Call us to get started
(translation to other languages available).

1.800.663.1142

TTY: 1.888.384.1152

Numéro sans frais - en français :
1.866.398.9505

International (Call collect):
604.689.1717

homewoodhealth.com

References

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