

Why assertiveness matters

Assertiveness is a crucial skill that can significantly enhance both your professional and personal interactions. It involves expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear, direct, and respectful manner.

Assertiveness matters in your life because it empowers you to communicate your needs, desires, and boundaries clearly and respectfully. It helps you to stand up for yourself without infringing on others' rights, leading to more balanced and fair interactions. Additionally, assertiveness boosts your self-confidence and self-esteem, as you learn to value your own opinions and feelings.

There are several misconceptions about assertiveness that can lead to misunderstandings or reluctance to adopt assertive behaviours. Here are some of the most common ones:

Assertiveness equals aggression:

Many people confuse assertiveness with aggression. While aggression involves violating others' rights and being confrontational, assertiveness is about expressing your needs and rights respectfully and calmly.

Assertive people are born, not made:

Some believe that assertiveness is an innate trait. Assertiveness is a skill that can be learned and developed through practice and self-awareness.

Being assertive means always getting your way:

Assertiveness is not about winning every argument or getting everything you want. It's



about communicating your needs and negotiating mutually beneficial solutions.

Assertiveness is selfish: Assertiveness involves respecting your own needs and boundaries, but it also includes considering and respecting others' needs. It's about finding a balance, not prioritizing yourself at the expense of others.

Assertive people are always confident:

Even assertive people can feel nervous or unsure at times. The key is that they choose to communicate assertively despite these feelings.

Here are some strategies to help you become more assertive without being mean or dominant:

- Recognize that you have the right to express your thoughts and feelings.

- Frame your thoughts and feelings from your perspective. For example, say "I feel..." instead of "You make me feel..."

- Pay attention to what others are saying without interrupting. Show empathy and acknowledge their points of view.

- Avoid raising your voice or sounding aggressive. A calm tone helps in keeping the conversation respectful and productive.

- It's important to set boundaries and not overcommit. Politely decline requests that you cannot accommodate and offer alternatives if possible.

- Focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions. Respect others' opinions and be willing to compromise when necessary.

Inside this edition

- Challenge yourself to cut sugar
- Trusting your instincts
- Be productive without burning out
- What are blue light blocking glasses?
- Quick tips to avoid getting sick

- Own your own flaws
- Arthritis and heart disease
- Ways to embrace solitude
- The lowdown on long COVID
- How to manage food intake



Smart Workplace
health and safety communications partners



Trusting your instincts

In a world driven by data and logic, the idea of trusting your instincts or listening to your inner voice might seem counterintuitive. However, intuition plays a crucial role in decision-making and personal safety.

According to [verwellmind.com](https://www.verwellmind.com), intuition, often referred to as a gut feeling, is the innate ability to understand something without the need for conscious reasoning. It is a powerful tool that can guide us in various aspects of life, from making everyday decisions to navigating complex situations.

Trusting your instincts can lead to better decision-making. Intuition allows you to tap into your subconscious mind, which processes information faster than your conscious mind. This can help you make quick and effective decisions, especially in high-pressure situations.

One of the most critical aspects of intuition is its role in personal security.

Many people have experienced a gut feeling that something is not right, prompting them to avoid potentially dangerous situations. This instinctual response can be life-saving.

Trusting your inner voice can also contribute to emotional well-being. It helps you stay true to yourself and make choices that align with your values and beliefs. This can lead to a more fulfilling and authentic life.

There is a significant correlation between gut feelings and decision-making, according to [hopkinsmedicine.org](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org). When you feel that something is not right, your body is responding to subtle cues and signals that your conscious mind may not immediately recognize. This instinctual response can prompt you to avoid certain situations, potentially protecting you from harm.

Challenge yourself to cut out added sugar

Are you up to cutting out added sugars for 30 days? Why not try a 30-day no sugar challenge?

According to [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com), the main goal is to cut out all sources of added sugar for 30 days. Instead, you focus on consuming nutrient-dense whole foods. Natural sugars, which are found in foods like vegetables, fruits, and dairy products, are OK to eat.

After the 30 days are over, the idea is not to return to the same level of sugar intake you were at before, but to recognize that you do not need all that sugar in your regular diet. Perhaps you have lost a kilo or two in the last 30 days, or you find your digestion has improved. Maybe your energy levels have been more consistent than the up and down “sugar rush” you used to have.

According to Health Canada consuming too many added sugars has been linked to an increased risk of tooth decay in children, excess calorie consumption which can lead to overweight and obesity. Obesity is a risk factor for chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, some forms of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Here are few suggestions to say no to the added sugar for one month. While following a 30-day no sugar challenge, you are encouraged to restrict foods and beverages high in added sugars including:

Sweeteners: table sugar, honey, maple syrup, corn syrup, agave, coconut sugar.

Sweetened beverages: soda, sweetened smoothies and juices, sweetened coffee drinks, sports drinks.

Condiments with added sugar: ketchup, BBQ sauce, honey mustard, coffee creamer.

Sweetened dairy products: flavoured yogurt, ice cream, chocolate milk.

Sugary baked goods: cookies, cakes, donuts, bread with added sugar.

Sugary breakfast foods: sugar-sweetened cereals, bars, granola, flavoured oatmeal.

Candy: chocolate, gummy candies, caramels.

Sugary alcoholic beverages: mixed drinks, sweetened liquor, sweetened canned alcoholic drinks.

Instead, fill up on whole, nutrient-dense foods, including:

Vegetables: broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, carrots, asparagus, zucchini, sweet potatoes.

Fruits: apples, oranges, berries, grapes, cherries, grapefruit.

Proteins: chicken, fish, beef, tofu, eggs.

Healthy fat sources: egg yolks, avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, unsweetened yogurt.

Complex carb sources: beans, quinoa, sweet potatoes, butternut squash, brown rice.

Unsweetened beverages: water, sparkling water, unsweetened coffee, tea.



Publisher & CEO: Stefan Dreesen

Editor: Kate Van Hoof-Peeren

H&S Communication Specialists:
Alan Haycroft, Liz Slobodin,
Kevin Harvey

TOLL FREE: 1-888-655-4800

Mailing Address: 2010 Winston Park Drive, Suite 200,
Oakville, ON L6H 5R7

www.smartworkplace.ca | info@smartworkplace.ca

The information presented in Wellness Zone has been compiled from sources believed to be reliable. However, it cannot be assumed that all acceptable measures are contained in this article nor that additional measures may not be required under particular or exceptional circumstances, or your own company procedures, or by federal, state/provincial and local law.

Application of this information to a specific worksite should be reviewed by a wellness professional. Anyone making use of the information set forth herein does so at his/her own risk and assumes any and all liability arising therefrom. Specific medical advice should be obtained through consultation with a physician or other trained health care practitioner. Wellness Zone is published monthly by Smart Workplace Inc. www.smartworkplace.ca. All rights reserved. © 2024. No part of this publication is to be copied without permission from the publisher.



Ways to be productive without burning out

It's hard living in an age of information overload and distraction. Emails pile up, notifications ping devices, and there's always another link to click or video to watch. With so many things competing for your attention, it's easy to lose focus.

The good news is that with the right strategies, you can become more productive. Here are a few tips:

Streamline your work environment. To do your best work, minimize external distractions. Start by decluttering your workspace. Remove everything non-essential--knickknacks, piles of paper, extra electronics. What's left should only be items you need to perform your core tasks. Clearing your desk helps clear your mind.

Optimize your mindset. Human productivity relies not just on external factors but also internal ones. What you believe about yourself and your capacity for focus shapes your potential. Cultivate an optimal mindset by banishing negative self-talk. Expand your beliefs about what you can accomplish. Tell yourself "I have the power to focus for long stretches of time" instead of "I get distracted so easily."

Systematize your schedule. With environment and mindset optimized, put structures in place to make the most of your time and energy. The most productive people ruthlessly systematize their days and know what they need to accomplish. Identify the three to five most important tasks that will move the needle on your

goals and block off time to tackle them first thing. Protect this time fiercely, not allowing less significant work to infringe.

Energize your body. Even the most organized schedule falls apart if you lack the physical energy to activate it. That's where good mental and physical health come in. Make sure your body is working with you, not against you. Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep per night and move your body daily to keep your energy levels high. Give yourself breaks from tasks to relax your mind or meditate. Nature walks are a fantastic way to "reboot" your brain too.

Motivate with momentum. Once you implement these foundations, leverage the power of momentum to drive productivity. The more you accomplish in a day, the more motivated you'll feel to maintain that pace. Allow yourself to get into a flow state by clearing other tasks after your most important work is done. Flow is that magical feeling when you're so focused, time flies by.

Master the art of productivity. The most productive people don't have superhuman abilities. They've simply mastered the art of protecting their time and energy, accomplishing what matters without getting bogged down in the trivial. Follow these best practices and watch your productivity skyrocket. The power to perform meaningful work and live purposefully lies within you.

Blue light blocking glasses explained

If you find yourself looking at electronic displays for a large part of each day, there's a good chance that the experience robs you of some of the high-quality sleep you might otherwise enjoy at night. Light from these displays occupying the blue wavelengths can disrupt various internal body clocks that your brain relies on to create the right conditions for restful sleep. Glasses that filter out light in the blue spectrum could be a solution.

Studies show that the brain tends to take the presence of the blue wavelengths as a signal to ready itself for alertness. As the day wears on, the eyes become more and more sensitive to blue light, with exposure to even low levels serving to disrupt the brain's ability to produce the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin. The brain needs blue light to kick into gear in the morning but needs to stay away from it after sundown to prepare for sleep.

Putting on blue light-blocking glasses after dusk can help filter the blue spectrum out of the light reaching your eyes and help your brain prepare adequately for sleep according to the National Institutes of Health, PubMed library.

During the day, natural sources of blue light keep you alert and functioning. But filtering out blue light from artificial sources during the day can still help you sleep better at night. Many people believe that the blue light-blocking feature in their regular prescription glasses does the job well enough, but studies show that they tend to only be partially effective against certain parts of the blue light spectrum. For this purpose, wearing glasses with amber lenses that block out all artificial blue light wavelengths can be more effective.

Many people tend to read too much into reports on the effectiveness of blue light-blocking glasses. They tend to believe that these lenses can even help them sidestep digital eyestrain or eye fatigue that results from excessive use of computer and phone displays. It is important to understand that blue light-blocking glasses are ineffective for this purpose. Studies show that they are effective only at letting people avoid the sleep disruption that results from excessive blue light exposure.

If you tend to find that your need to use electronic screens disrupts your ability to get a good night's sleep, considering blue light-blocking glasses can be of possible help.

IT'S OKAY TO MAKE MISTAKES

The power of owning your flaws

When in the wrong, do you admit to it and say sorry? Are you open about your personality deficits, or do you try to pretend they are not there? People can sometimes struggle to confess wrongdoing or admit that their characters are less than perfect because it makes them feel ashamed or inferior. Yet owning your mistakes and fallibility can be empowering.

Here are ways you will benefit by being comfortable with your personality flaws and the errors you make:

Embracing your shadow. Every person alive today has personality flaws and the capacity to do wicked things. You are not exempt from this. If you consistently deny your shadow self, it will grow bigger until you notice it. For example, suppose you refuse to acknowledge that you can behave violently under extreme circumstances, such as a fight for your life. Failing to recognize that you have the potential to do physical harm will increase the odds of it occurring. Acknowledging that all humans can be violent will make you less likely to get into a physical altercation. If you know you could be violent under extreme provocation, you can walk away when someone provokes you.

Garnering respect. What is your opinion of people who neglect to own their flaws and mistakes? Do you respect them? If you struggle to hold people who do not admit to wrongdoing in high regard, you will understand why others take a similar stance.

Admitting flaws and mistakes instead of trying to make someone else responsible when things go wrong will allow others to respect and appreciate you more than they ever put a foot wrong.

Taking power away from toxic individuals. You may meet individuals who delight in

pointing out the imperfections in other people. It is particularly gratifying for them if they can shock you with a flaw you failed to see in yourself and damage your self-esteem.

When you are honest with yourself about your mistakes and your unattractive traits, nobody can weaponize the truth against you. Thus, it is well worth acknowledging the truth of yourself so that nobody can use it to hurt you. Indeed, if someone criticizes you and you agree with them, you take away their power to hurt you with uncomfortable truths and leave them with nowhere to go next in the conversation.

Dropping the judgment. In contemporary society you will often witness finger-pointing and a remarkable lack of introspection. Why is this the case? It is easy to judge others harshly because it makes you feel better about yourself if you can say someone is worse than you are. Perceiving your negative traits and errors is more of a challenge because it involves acknowledging painful truths about yourself.

Yet when you see the truth of yourself and all the ugly bits, you will be less willing to judge others and far more empathetic. Imagine how much happier a place the world would be to live in if everyone stopped criticizing each other's flaws and errors.

Personal evolution. If you do not acknowledge the aspects of your character that could use work, you have no way of improving or evolving as a human being. For instance, suppose you interrupt others and are conversationally selfish. You will never learn to stop talking and listen more unless you can see that you do interrupt others mid-conversation.

Quick tips to avoid getting sick

People can be infected with cold and flu-causing viruses and bacteria at any time. Germs that reside in abundance on telephones, door handles, counter tops, and computer keyboards are easily transmitted through the air, or get passed around by shaking hands and other casual contact. So how do you keep from getting sick when people are coughing, sneezing and otherwise transferring germs right and left? Aside from the obvious strategy of frequent handwashing, there are many other steps that are effective against preventing a bout with a cold or flu.

- **Drink plenty of fluids.** We've all heard that you should drink lots of water and fruit juices when you are sick, but staying hydrated also goes a long way in preventing sickness in the first place. Every cell in your body depends on water to function properly, so drink plenty.

- **Sterilize your toothbrush on a regular basis.** The toothbrush is an optimal breeding ground for bacteria which thrive in warm, moist environments. Luckily, you have probably already developed immunity to the type of microbes that comes from your mouth and continuously reproduces on your toothbrush, but sterilizing takes care of the ones to which you are not immune. Simply let your toothbrush soak in anti-bacterial mouthwash, or better yet, run it through your dishwasher's heated drying cycle.

- **Pay special attention to the kitchen.** Some studies suggest that the kitchen has far more germ-infested surfaces than bathrooms. Change kitchen towels often; wipe down counter-tops daily with a disinfectant; and sterilize kitchen sponges in the microwave or dishwasher.

- **Take probiotics.** One of the best practices for preventative medicine is making sure your intestinal flora is in proper balance. Probiotics are good bacteria that are essential for making sure the immune system is functioning properly. Probiotics are readily available in the vitamin section of most major stores and are contained in foods such as kefir, yogurt, sauerkraut, or buttermilk.

- **Keep a positive attitude.** Studies show that the body and the brain communicate in phenomenal ways and that people who have a positive disposition, in general, have better immune systems. One study even found that more flu antibodies are produced by people who have a more optimistic nature.



Ways to embrace solitude

In today's fast-paced world, the idea of spending time alone can often be misunderstood. While some may equate solitude with loneliness, the two concepts are fundamentally different. Understanding and embracing the benefits of spending time alone can lead to significant improvements in mental and emotional well-being.

Being alone is a physical state where an individual is not in the company of others. It is a choice to spend time alone, which can be both refreshing and rejuvenating according to Psychology Today. Loneliness, on the other hand, is an emotional state characterized by feelings of isolation and disconnection, even when surrounded by people.

According to Robert Coplan, a professor of psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa, solitude can be highly beneficial for both mental and physical health. Coplan emphasizes that solitude is not the same as loneliness; when chosen, it can lead to positive outcomes such as increased creativity, better emotional regulation, and improved social relationships.

Here are some practical ways to make the most of your solitary moments:

Morning rituals: Start your day with some quiet time. Wake up a bit earlier to enjoy activities like meditation, journaling, or simply sipping your coffee in peace.

Nature walks: Take a walk in a nearby park or nature reserve. Being in nature can be calming and help you reconnect with yourself.

Reading: Dive into a good book. Reading can be a great way to escape and stimulate your mind.

Creative pursuits: Engage in creative activities like painting, writing, or playing a musical instrument. These activities can be therapeutic and fulfilling.

Exercise: Physical activity, whether it's yoga, running, or a workout session, can help clear your mind and boost your mood.

Mindfulness and meditation: Practice mindfulness or meditation to centre yourself and reduce stress.

Solo travel: Plan a solo trip, even if it's just a day trip to a nearby town. Traveling alone can be a great way to explore new places and gain new perspectives.

Self-care: Take a long bath, do a skincare routine, or simply relax with some music. Self-care activities can help you feel rejuvenated.

Remember, the key is to choose activities that you enjoy and that help you feel relaxed and recharged.

Arthritis and heart disease: Tips to reduce your risk

(NC) Arthritis is often associated with joint pain, fatigue and reduced mobility. But there are some lesser-known side effects that can have a tremendous impact on your body.

For example, did you know that arthritis can increase the risk of cardiovascular events such as heart attacks, strokes, heart failure and even death?

Chronic inflammation, a key component of arthritis, can damage the lining of blood vessels, leading to plaque build-up, clots and narrowing of the arteries. This can reduce blood flow to organs like the heart or brain and can lead to heart attacks or strokes, respectively.

Traditional risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, high blood sugar and being overweight or obese are also more common in people living with arthritis, and all play a significant role in elevating cardiovascular risk.

Identifying and addressing these risk factors and limiting inflammation is crucial to managing one's cardiovascular risk. Here are a few ways to improve your condition and reduce your risk of heart disease:

Exercise regularly: Painful joints can make it hard to exercise, but even low-impact activities such as walking, swimming and bicycling are beneficial for your heart health.

Eat well: Eating nutritious foods and maintaining a healthy weight can decrease the risks of high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. Meal planning and incorporating anti-inflammatory recipes can go a long way.

Limit stress: Feeling overwhelmed and under pressure can spark a negative physiological response. It's important to apply stress-managing strategies like mindfulness meditation or yoga to help alleviate cardiovascular strain.

Stop smoking: Smoking has been linked to worsening arthritis symptoms and joint damage and can increase your risk of heart disease by as much as 50%. Many pharmacies offer support programs and monitoring for smoking cessation. Ask your pharmacist how they can help.

Keep tabs: Speak to your health-care provider about regular screening – ideally once a year – for high blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol levels. If elevated, there are many effective lifestyle interventions and medications to treat these and lower your risk of heart disease.

Manage symptoms: Taking control of your arthritis and inflammation through ongoing management and monitoring with your health-care provider is paramount to keeping your heart healthy.

Find more information from Arthritis Society Canada at arthritis.ca.

The lowdown on long COVID

(NC) What do you know about long COVID? Also known as post-COVID condition, it's one of the longer-lasting side effects of a COVID-19 infection. The virus goes away, but certain symptoms persist.

Long COVID is specifically when symptoms of COVID-19 continue to be experienced for more than 12 weeks after the initial infection and can last for weeks, months or longer. Some of the most common long COVID symptoms in adults are fatigue, trouble sleeping, shortness of breath, general pain and discomfort, and brain fog.

Symptoms can vary from person to person, and while there isn't one specific treatment to help with long COVID, your health-care provider may suggest options to manage specific symptoms. These can include medications, physical therapy to help with pain and counselling to manage any psychological effects.

The good news is that getting vaccinated can help. According to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization's guidance on the use of COVID-19 vaccines during the fall of 2024, there appears to



be a positive relationship between the number of doses received and the level of protection against long COVID. Another recent study shows that COVID-19 vaccines consistently help to prevent long COVID symptoms in adults.

To reduce your risk of severe or long-term effects from COVID, keep your vaccinations current. Speak with a qualified health-care professional or visit your local pharmacy to learn more.

energyzone

Don't underestimate green beans!



Green beans contain many important nutrients that provide several health benefits.

These low-calorie legumes are full of antioxidants, including vitamin C, flavonols, quercetin, and kaempferol. These antioxidants fight free radicals in the body, which helps to reduce cell damage and may help to lower your risk of certain health conditions.

Despite their name, however, they're not always green. The green bean is a type of common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), and it can be yellow or purple, too.

A single cup of fresh green beans contains approximately 25% of your recommended daily intake of vitamin C. It also has around 15% of your recommended daily intake of vitamin A, a vitamin necessary for eye health, as well as 33% of your recommended daily intake of folate.

Ways to manage your food intake

Portion control is a crucial aspect of maintaining a healthy diet and overall well-being. It involves regulating the amount of food you consume in one sitting, which can significantly impact your health, weight management, and even your energy levels throughout the day.

Larger portion sizes can lead to consuming more calories than your body needs, which can result in weight gain. By controlling portions, you ensure that you eat only what your body requires, and you can prevent digestive discomfort and promote better digestion.

For individuals with diabetes or those at risk, portion control helps in managing blood sugar levels by regulating the intake of carbohydrates.

By serving appropriate portions, you can minimize food waste, which is beneficial for both your wallet and the environment.

Here are a few tips to keep an eye on your food intake according to cart2table.ca:

- 1. Use smaller plates:** This simple trick can make your portions appear larger, helping you feel satisfied with less food.
- 2. Measure your food:** Use measuring cups, spoons, and a kitchen scale to accurately measure your portions. This is especially useful when starting out with portion control.
- 3. Follow the plate method:** Fill half your plate with non-starchy vegetables, one-quarter with lean protein, and one-quarter with whole grains or starchy vegetables.
- 4. Avoid eating from packages:** Serve your food on a plate instead of eating directly from the package to avoid mindless overeating.
- 5. Listen to your hunger cues:** Eat slowly and pay attention to your body's signals. Stop eating when you feel satisfied, not when your plate is empty.
- 6. Plan your meals:** Preparing meals in advance can help you control portion sizes and avoid the temptation of overeating.
- 7. Stay hydrated:** Sometimes thirst is mistaken for hunger. Drink a glass of water before meals to help control your appetite.