



INCREASED TAX-DAY STRESS PUTS HEALTH AT RISK

With Ontarians already worried about the effects of an economic downturn, the April 30 deadline to file income taxes may seem overwhelming or frightening—especially for those who fear that they will owe the government more money. That extra pressure can be unmanageable, leading to an increase in the unhealthy ways that Ontarians deal with stress. The Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) cautions that while this time of year may seem excessively difficult; relying on harmful behaviors to alleviate stress contributes to physical and emotional health problems in the future.

“People who cope with stress in unhealthy ways may alleviate symptoms of stress in the short term, but end up creating significant personal health problems over time, and, ironically, more stress,” says Dr. Mary Broga, Past-President of the Ontario Psychological Association. “It’s important that people identify times of the year, such as tax season, that may cause increased stress in their lives and take a proactive approach to stress management by creating opportunities to engage in healthier coping behaviors.”

According to the American Psychological Association’s 2008 Stress in America poll, 8 out of 10 Americans say that the economy is a significant cause of stress. The survey also revealed that many Americans chose unhealthy ways to cope with their stress. Almost 50% reported overeating or eating unhealthy foods to manage stress, while 39 percent skipped a meal in the last month because of stress. Almost one-fifth of Americans report drinking alcohol to manage their stress, and 16 percent report smoking.

OPA offers these strategies for managing financial stress:

Identify money stressors — What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Are they related to meeting tax deadlines, paying bills, money decisions, financial responsibilities at work or home? Or something else?

Recognize how you deal with financial stress — Some people deal with stress by using unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, drinking or using food. Determine if you are using those types of unhealthy behaviors to cope with financial related stress. Is this a behavior you rely on year-round, or is it specific to tax filing deadlines or other money decisions? Do you turn to unhealthy financial behaviors such as overspending, misuse of credit cards, neglecting bills or constantly borrowing money in an effort to deal with financial stressors?

Understand what money means to you — Money is often symbolic of emotional issues that may seem unrelated to your personal finances. What does money represent to you? How might that increase your stress?

Find healthy ways to manage stress — Consider healthy, stress-reducing activities — taking a short walk, exercise, or talking things out with friends or family. Try to develop these types of healthy stress management behaviors so that when you’re in a financial crisis, you’ll have healthy strategies available to help you reduce stress. Keep in mind, unhealthy behaviors develop over the course of time and can be difficult to change. Don’t take on too much at one time. Focus on changing only one behavior at a time.

Ask for professional support — Accepting help from friends and family who care about you and will listen to you about your financial challenges can improve your ability to manage stress. Financial planners are also available to help you take control over your money situation. If you continue to be overwhelmed by financial stress, you may want to talk with a psychologist who can help you address the emotions behind your money behaviors, manage stress and change unhealthy behaviors.

Ontario Psychological Association offers tips to manage financial stress

The Ontario Psychological Association:
www.psych.on.ca
Dr. Ruth Berman, Executive Director
416-961-5552

Other resources related to stress and mind-body health can be found on the website of the American Psychological Association www.apa.org/helpcenter and <http://www.yourmindyourbody.org/>



Tel: (416) 961-0069

Toll Free 1-800-268-0069

OPA

730 Yonge Street
Suite #221
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2B7

Phone: 416-961-5552

Fax: 416-961-5516

E-mail: opa@psych.on.ca