



Timely Information for Personal Success

Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace

By Jennifer FitzPatrick

Most Americans caring for an older family member also work outside the home. Caregiving for an elderly loved one is stressful enough, but trying to manage a full-time job simultaneously can be downright grueling. What can employers do to assure productivity while supporting employees caught in this predicament?

❖ *Recognize that caregiving issues will continue to arise in the workplace.* With the aging population explosion, there are more caregivers in the workplace each year. Thinking ahead about how the organization can respond to these problems will be an investment in valued employees. Most organizations are mandated to offer Family & Medical Leave Act (FLMA) time off, but are there other benefits available through a health insurance plan or an employee assistance program? Can the organization develop some accommodating policies, such as more liberal telecommuting or longer penalty-free unpaid leave of absences?

❖ *Foster an environment that encourages open communication.* Employees are often reluctant to open up due to concern about their job, but it is much better for an employee to tell a manager what is going on with her mother than have the manager wondering why the worker has been late six times in the last month. Genuinely interested managers facilitate two-way communication.

❖ *Understand that caregivers are vulnerable.* Caregiving for a senior is an enormous responsibility and

the fewer people helping, the more prone the caregiver is to suffer health consequences. Encourage caregiver employees to seek help from resources such as their local Area Agency on Aging — to find the one serving your region, check out www.n4a.org. The Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org) is an excellent resource for caregivers taking care of people with dementia.

❖ *Think about having a “caregiver shower.”* When there is a new parent in the workplace, many offices will host showers. If that is the organization's culture, throw a shower for the caregiver! Items given will vary, but a gift certificate to a favorite takeout restaurant is always a great idea since the last thing most caregivers want to do when they get home from work is prepare a meal. ■

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Healthy Recipe: Steak Burritos for Two

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/4 cup prepared fresh salsa
- 1/4 cup water
- 2 tablespoons instant brown rice
- 3/4 cup canned black beans, preferably low-sodium, rinsed
- 6 ounces strip steak, trimmed and thinly sliced crosswise
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1-1/2 teaspoons canola oil
- Two 8-inch tortillas, preferably whole-wheat
- 1/4 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons prepared guacamole

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 471
- Carbohydrates: 49 g.
- Protein: 31 g.
- Sodium: 600 mg.
- Fat: 16 g.
- Saturated fat: 6 g.
- Fiber: 7 g.



DIRECTIONS:

① Combine salsa and water in a small saucepan; bring to a boil. Stir in rice, reduce heat to a simmer, cover and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in beans, return to a simmer and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until rice is tender and most of the liquid is absorbed, about 5 minutes more. ② Meanwhile, sprinkle steak with pepper. Heat oil in medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add steak and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes. ③ To assemble, divide steak among the tortillas and top with equal amounts of cheese, guacamole, and rice mixture. Roll each tortilla up into a burrito.

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Questions and Answers

The Truth About Coffee

Q: Doctors used to worry that coffee was bad for the heart: and that it would give you ulcers, and could make you overly nervous. Now, you hear all these positive things. Just what is the truth about coffee?

A: In excess, coffee *can* cause problems. But recent research has linked coffee to health benefits, not harm, including possible protective effects from everything from Parkinson's disease to diabetes to some types of cancer. A recent issue of the *Harvard Health Letter* examines some of the main ingredients, including:

❖ **Caffeine.** Caffeine probably has multiple targets in the brain, but the main one seems to be adenosine receptors. A part of the brain affected by Parkinson's disease, called the striatum, is loaded with adenosine receptors. By docking on them, caffeine may have some protective effects against the disease. Caffeine has some negative short-term effects on the cardiovascular system, raising blood pressure and perhaps making arteries stiffer. But habitual use may cause some of those effects to wear off.

❖ **Antioxidants.** Coffee contains a fair amount of antioxidants, including a powerful one called chlorogenic acid. ■

Source: *Harvard Health Publications.*

Alcohol: How Much is Too Much?

A huge study showing that moderate, prudent drinking protects the heart and arteries raises a big question: "What should we do with this information?" In what sounds like a contradictory conclusion, the researchers say their findings "lend further support for limits on alcohol consumption." That makes sense, reports the *Harvard Heart Letter*, when you consider the complexity of alcohol's effects on heart disease, stroke, and other aspects of health.

In the study, which included more than two million men and women followed for an average of 11 years, moderate alcohol use was compared to **no** alcohol use.

The *amount* of alcohol consumed greatly influenced the effect. For coronary artery disease and heart attack, *any* amount of alcohol — from just under one-half drink per day on up — *reduced* heart disease risk by about 25%.

But this was *offset* by stroke risk: at four drinks per day, the risk of having a stroke was 62% higher than it was with no alcohol

use, and the risk of dying from a stroke was 44% higher. The lowest risk for any cause of death was at one drink per day.

While a drink a day may be good for the heart, many people drink much more than that. Excessive drinking is a major cause of preventable deaths in the United States and contributes to liver disease, a variety of cancers, and other health problems.

Furthermore, too much alcohol can dissolve the best of intentions and the closest relationships. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimates that **4 in 10** people who drink alcohol are either heavy drinkers or at risk of becoming one.

If alcohol affected only the coronary arteries, a drink a day might be good medicine. But it affects almost every body part, and the amount consumed determines the ultimate outcome. That means careful consideration is needed for this two-sided beverage. ■

Source: *Harvard Health Publications.*