ISSUE THREE, 2014

Let's Talk

FOH.hhs.gov/eapnews

Identity Theft: How to Protect Yourself

Having your identity used to cheat you out of your hard earned money can be devastating—and recovering financially from it can be an uphill battle.

Being the victim of identity theft is like having your house burglarized. In both cases, strangers force their way into areas that you consider private and harm you financially.

Identity thieves don't need a key or a crowbar to do their dirty work—they only need your personal information. These criminals can then use that information to empty your bank account, add charges to your credit cards, open new accounts, and even get medical treatment using your health insurance policy.

There are a number of things you can do to protect information from identity thieves:

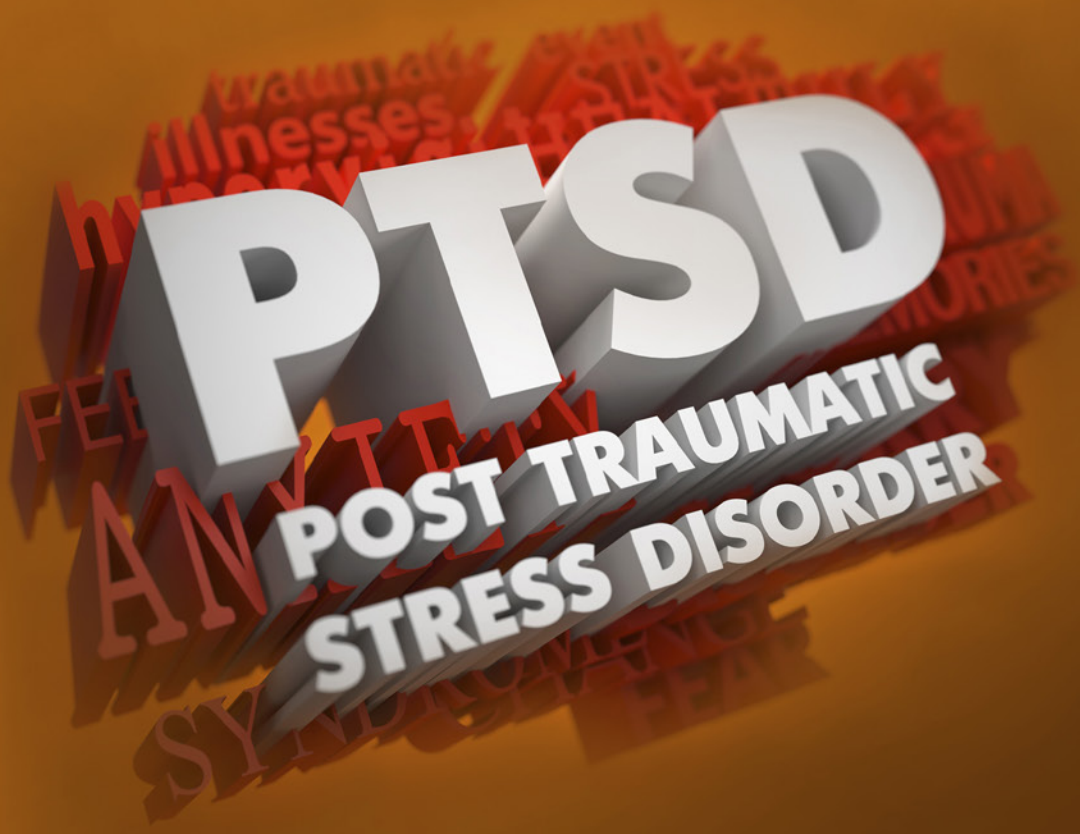
At home – Lock up your financial documents; shred receipts, insurance and physician forms, expired credit cards, and other financial documents when you no longer need them; destroy the labels on prescription drug bottles before throwing them away

At work/away from home – Carry only the information you need (leave your Social Security card at home); don't leave your wallet or purse unattended

At the mailbox – Take outgoing mail directly to the post office or to an officially designated mail collection box; don't let incoming mail sit in your mailbox, and request a vacation hold on your mail if you'll be away from home for several days; don't have new checks delivered to your home unless you have a secure mailbox with a lock

Online – Keep your passwords private; don't open files, click on links, or download programs sent by strangers; lock your laptop; encrypt your data; install anti-virus and anti-spyware software; wipe your laptop or smartphone memory clean before disposing of them; if a company with whom you have an account asks you online or by phone to confirm your password or user ID, don't respond directly—contact the company's customer service office to confirm that they need the information

If you think you've been a victim of identity theft, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you take steps to stem the damage and protect your credit rating. The EAP also provides a kit on protecting yourself from identity theft. Contact the EAP today by calling **1-800-222-0364** (TTY: 1-888-262-7848) or visit our website at **FOH4You.**



Recovery from PTSD takes time and patience. The good news is that there is expert help available to give you support along the way.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (often referred to as PTSD) is a condition of persistent mental and emotional stress, which occurs as a result of injury or severe psychological shock. The disorder is typically characterized by depression, anxiety, flashbacks, sleep disturbances, and avoidance of reminders of the event.

With PTSD, the nervous system appropriately goes into red-alert for the initial experience, but then doesn't respond to the "all safe" message that the experience is over and the danger is gone. Memories of the experience can trigger the overwhelming flood of feelings of the earlier experience.

Some of the traumas that can trigger PTSD include:

– Childhood traumas (being in an accident, physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, etc.)

– Personal attacks (domestic violence, robbery, rape, etc.)

– Accidents (motor vehicle crash, falling of a ladder, etc.)

– Natural disasters (hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, etc.)

– Man-made disasters (fires, explosions, acts of terrorism, etc.)

– War (experiencing combat first-hand as a soldier or civilian)

Common symptoms

People with PTSD may experience a number of symptoms. Some of the more common symptoms of PTSD are:

Re-experiencing

Flashbacks – having feelings or seeing mental images that make the person feel like he or she is reliving the experience

– Bad dreams related to the experience

– Overwhelmingly frightening thoughts

Avoidance

– Avoiding people, places, or other things that remind you of the experience

– Avoiding talking—or thinking—about the experience or things related to it

Psychological and emotional changes

– Strong feelings of fear, guilt, or shame

– Things that used to interest you and bring you enjoyment no longer do

Hyper-arousal

– Feeling overly nervous, sensitive, or "on edge"

– Easily startled

– Having difficulty sleeping or relaxing

– Having outbursts of anger or frustration

Scientists are continually learning more about PTSD and ways to treat it. Regular sessions with a counselor who specializes in PTSD have been shown to be effective, as have some prescription medications.

It takes time to recover from PTSD.

If you're on the road to healing from PTSD, be gentle with yourself and recognize your progress.

If you feel you're experiencing PTSD symptoms, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help. Call toll free, anytime day or night, **1-800-222-0364** (TTY: 1-888-262-7848) or visit our website at **FOH4You.com** to learn more.

Antidote for Stress: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation can provide an effective release for tension and stress.

Stress can occur suddenly, or can build up over time. However it happens, muscles of the body become tense in a way that adds to overall feelings of distress. Managing stress through a progressive muscle relaxation technique—the tensing and relaxing of various muscle groups—is a proven and practicable way to release unwanted body tension associated with stress.

Before getting started

- You can practice this technique while sitting in your chair or lying down.
- It is helpful to note how tense you feel before practicing the progressive relaxation, and then to compare this tension level to how you feel afterward.
- You can rate your level of tension on a scale from 1 to 10 to help with the comparison.

The technique

STEP 1 Close your eyes and focus on your toes. Curl your toes in toward your feet and squeeze them tight. Keep squeezing until you feel the tension in your muscles.

STEP 2 Relax your muscles; feel the restful sensation in your toes.

STEP 3 Repeat this procedure for your feet. First, flex them in toward your body, hold, and release. Then point them out away from your body, hold, and release.

STEP 4 Follow the same tensing, holding, then releasing process for your calves, then your thighs, then your buttocks.

STEP 5 Make a fist with your hands and squeeze, then tense your arms, and hold. Notice the feelings of heaviness or warmth. Release and notice the sense of well-being you attain when you release the tension.

STEP 6 Tense your back, neck, and face muscles, one at a time. Hold each position as long as it is comfortable to do so.

STEP 7 Tense all the muscles in your body at once, remembering to tense, hold, and then release. This time you should feel a growing sense of relaxation spreading through your body—allow yourself to completely relax.

Consult with your health care provider before beginning any new stretching and exercise program—especially if you have any health concerns.

Add progressive relaxation to your toolkit of stress relieving techniques. And, remember it's easy to practice anywhere—sitting or lying down.

CHOOSING HEALTH—HEART HEALTH

You make health choices – good or bad – every day, sometimes without even realizing it. Surprisingly, it's often the small choices that we make each day that can add up to big health benefits in the end.

Whether it's choosing to eat a healthy breakfast in the morning or getting in a few extra steps with an evening stroll, these seemingly small things can make a considerable difference in your overall health.

A conscious choice

Making a conscious choice to do things that will make your heart healthy can be a great way to improve your overall health. That's because the heart and the circulatory system are interconnected with so many other functions of the body.

Taking control

The steps you take to keep your heart healthy can have many positive side benefits, including lowering your risk of other diseases, including diabetes, stroke, and obesity.

The term "modifiable risk factor" refers to those things that you can control—things you can change or "modify"—choices you can make everyday.

The great thing about choosing a healthier lifestyle is that you will not only lower your risk for disease, but **you'll have more energy and feel better** soon after making the changes.

Lowering your risk

The first step to lowering your risk is often a change in attitude. This can help create the mindset where making healthy choices begins to come more naturally. For instance, you may want to remind yourself: "I deserve to be healthy," "I take good care of myself," or "I easily make healthy choices, today."

The basis

These are ways you can lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and obesity:

– Be physically active at least 30 minutes per day, at least five days a week

– Lower your weight or maintain a healthy weight (less than 25 BMI)

– Eat healthy foods in small portions

– Reduce stress

(See the article "*Antidote for Stress: Progressive Muscle Relaxation*" in this issue of *Let's Talk*.)

Work closely and seek assistance and counseling from your health care provider for conditions related to heart disease:

– High cholesterol – High blood pressure – Diabetes – Smoking

You can visit your worksite health unit to get your BMI, blood pressure, cholesterol readings.

Start small. Give yourself credit for the positive changes you're making. And, enjoy the new you.

This newsletter is brought to you by the Federal Occupational Health (FOH) Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, management consultation, and coaching services to Federal employees and agencies throughout the United States.
For administrative details about the program, contact Chiquita Cooper at 404-562-7950, ext. 125, or email **Chiquita.Cooper@foh.hhs.gov**.
To visit us on the Web, please go to **FOH4You.com**.

Help is available all day, all week, all year. **1-800-222-0364**, TTY: 1-888-262-7848.

Let's Talk is available electronically at **FOH.hhs.gov/eapnews**.

FEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

The Occupational Health Provider of Choice for the Federal Government

FOH is dedicated to its mission of improving the health, safety, and productivity of our Federal employees. Created by Congress in 1946, FOH is a non-appropriated service agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

FOH offers a full range of occupational health services—including Clinical, Wellness/Fitness, Employee Assistance and Work/Life Programs, Organization Development, and Environmental Health and Safety programs— exclusively to Federal employees.

Visit FOH on the Web at **FOH.hhs.gov** and **FOH.hhs.gov/Calendar**.