



Let's Talk

A Change of Attitude: Body Image

In the scenery of spring there is nothing superior nothing inferior; flowering branches are by nature different, some short some long. – Zen Proverb

We sometimes forget that variety is part of nature. When we think of the characteristics of something as simple as a flower, we quickly realize that they come in many colors, sizes, and shapes. We're glad for this diversity in nature, but when it comes to our own bodies, we often think we should fit the standard model (pun intended).

We have a mental disconnect, at times, and wonder why we don't look like what is presented to us in advertisements. We forget that everyone is different and that the people we tend to see in advertisement aren't necessarily meant to represent reality. Instead, the goal of advertising is to inspire us to buy some product or service.

In a study from researchers at the University of Arizona published in the May 2012 issue of *Sex Roles*, Dr. Shannon Snapp and her colleagues found certain factors that appear to help young women maintain a positive image of their bodies.

- Having a high level of family support
- Feeling as if they had low levels of pressure from family, friends, and the media about achieving a "thin and beautiful" ideal
- Having effective stress-relieving strategies

Having support, less pressure to achieve an ideal, and keeping a healthy image of ourselves can be good for our emotional health. It can also be good for our physical health, as we take a more relaxed and practical approach to change—change that's based more on how we feel and less on how we look.

One way to shift your attitude is to focus on:

- Being fit, rather than trying to achieve a certain weight
- Feeling good, with less concern about "looking good" or achieving a certain ideal

Strategies for better self-esteem:

- Be happy with who you are right now, while knowing that you will change
- Make a list of things that you value about yourself
- Make a list of things that you think are important and rank them (you may find your "looks" toward the bottom of the list)
- Make positive affirmations everyday that you're changing for the better

Some lifestyle changes that can help make you feel and look better:

- Healthy eating

- Regular physical activity
- Deep relaxation
- Quality sleep at night

Feeling comfortable in your own skin is a great gift to give yourself. It can begin with a simple change in attitude. □



Clutter Control

Clutter may not seem like a huge problem, but when it grows too big it can cause anxiety and waste huge amounts of time.

Clutter is a simple word for a very messy concept. We've all encountered clutter: Often it's piles of papers, books, receipts, newspapers, food wrappers. It grows on desks, counters, floors—anywhere there's a flat surface. These days, thanks to the Internet, we even have cyber-clutter—like the millions of e-mails and documents sitting in neglected computer folders.

Clutter distracts us, drains our energy, annoys our co-workers—it can even cause health problems. And of course, when a worker spends hours every week looking for misplaced items, their efficiency suffers greatly.

According to FOH Environmental Health specialist Bradley Christ, extreme clutter can interfere with safe access to workspaces, can block ventilation and sprinklers, and can present fire hazards.

OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) states that “walking-

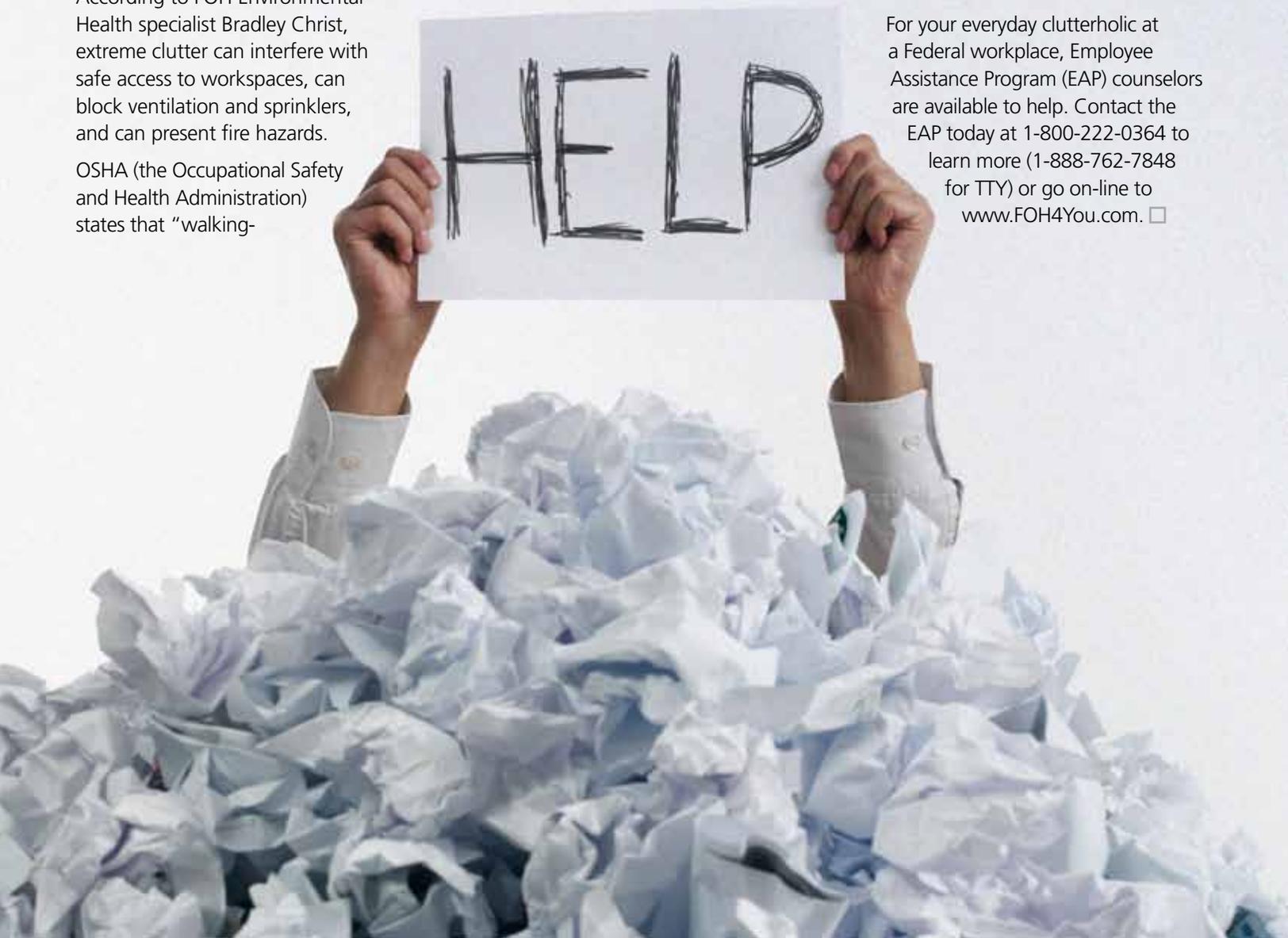
working surfaces” must be kept clear of hazards that can cause people to slip and trip. In offices, that often means eliminating power and computer cords that snake across floors.

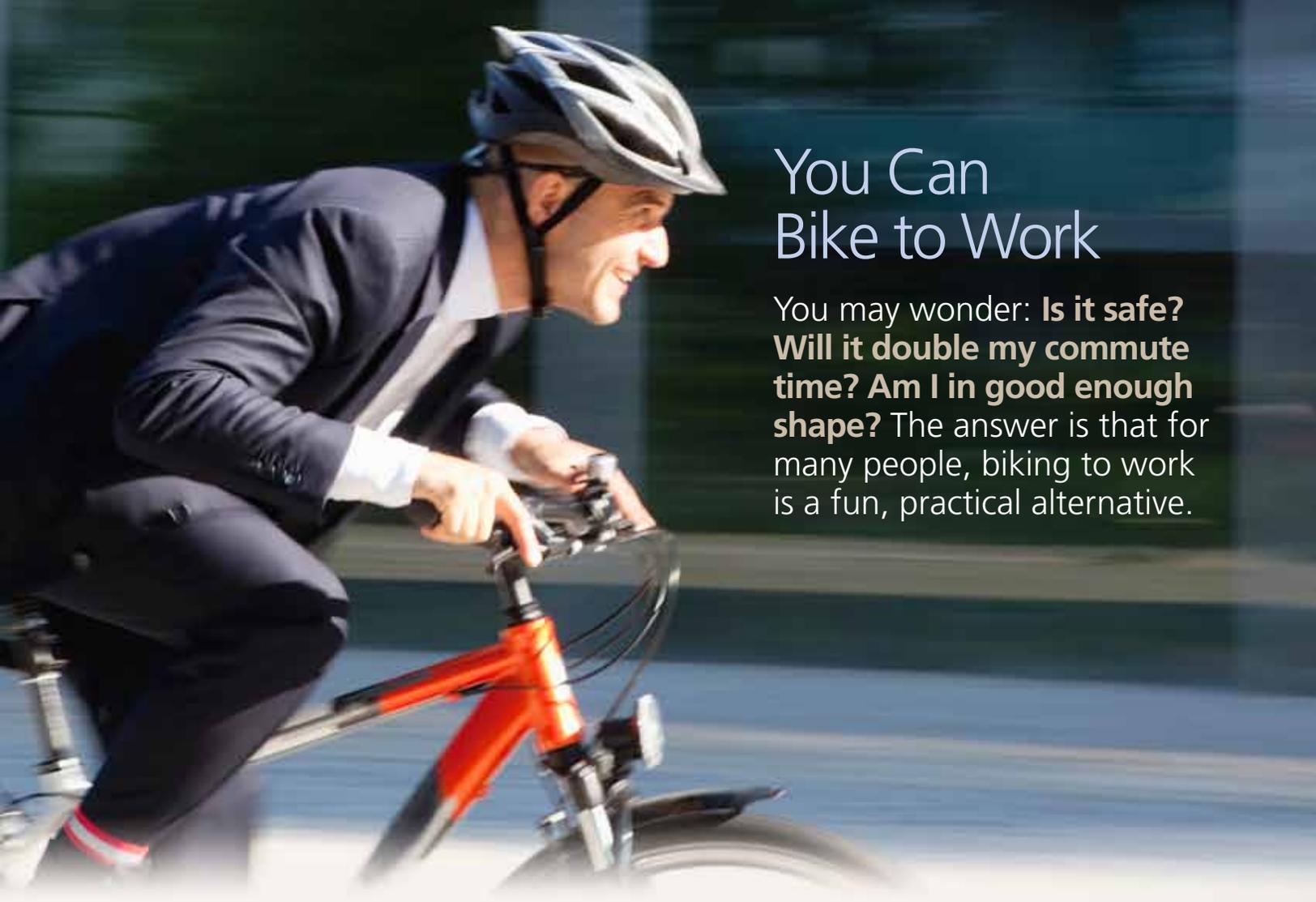
OSHA also warns that major clutter on desks can pose ergonomic risks—for example, causing people to place their computer, monitor and keyboard in awkward positions because they don't have room at their work station. Similarly, boxes piled up beneath desks can lead to uncomfortable and inefficient work postures, which in turn can produce shoulder, back and neck pain.

Clutter has become such a problem in our lives that it has spawned a whole new line of work—the professional organizer, sometimes known as the clutter doctor or clutter buster. The National Association of Professional Organizers includes 4,200 members who help people tame the mess in their homes and businesses.

Clutter in its most extreme forms can turn into hoarding, in which people fill up their homes with useless items to the point where it prevents them from living normal, healthy lives. Those cases can require intervention from relatives, de-hoarding experts, and even public health officials.

For your everyday clutterholic at a Federal workplace, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselors are available to help. Contact the EAP today at 1-800-222-0364 to learn more (1-888-762-7848 for TTY) or go on-line to www.FOH4You.com. □





You Can Bike to Work

You may wonder: **Is it safe? Will it double my commute time? Am I in good enough shape?** The answer is that for many people, biking to work is a fun, practical alternative.

Anybody will tell you that bicycling to work is great exercise, can save you money, and is good for the environment. But for many people, the very idea of commuting to work is daunting.

Let's look at some of the potential problems and possible solutions.

You don't have to be Lance Armstrong to bike to work. You can bike one day a week at first, then do more as you gain stamina.

DISTANCE. For most folks, a commute of less than five miles is reasonable. Give yourself about 35-40 minutes for a five-mile trip. If you're in better physical condition, ten miles can be done, and should take less than an hour.

Keep in mind that bicycling can be combined with other transportation modes. Many public buses have special racks where riders can stash their bikes, then quickly remove them when they get off, and start pedaling again. If you ride the subway, you can ride to a subway stop, park your bike, and take the train the rest of the way.

PARKING. Check out your workplace for a secure place to park bikes. Many buildings have bike parking areas, or little-used storage areas where you can get permission to park. Wherever you park your bike, make sure you lock it to a solidly grounded, stationary object.

TRAFFIC. Riding a bike through rush-hour traffic can be intimidating. So keep in mind that the car routes you're familiar with may not be the best for bikers. Of course, bike paths and bike lanes on streets can be helpful.

When you're starting out, try out your planned route on a weekend, when you're not in a hurry and can explore a bit.

PERSONAL GROOMING. On hot days especially, you can work up a good sweat on your bike ride, so it's smart to do some personal cleanup when you arrive at work. If your workplace has a shower, that's the best choice. Otherwise, a couple of minutes in a restroom with a wet washcloth or some hand wipes and a freshly laundered shirt can help make you presentable.

ROAD SAFETY. Bicyclists are vulnerable, so ride carefully and defensively. Wear a helmet. Obey traffic laws and signals. Expect cars to do the unexpected. Riding during daylight is generally safer than riding at night, and if you ride after dark, use lights and reflectors.

Bicycle to work, and you'll soon notice all kinds of benefits — improved cardio fitness, easier weight control, and money in your pocket that you're not spending on gas, tolls, and parking fees. □

CHOCOLATE'S GOOD FOR YOU: TRUE OR FALSE?

On Monday you were having an extra big piece of chocolate, because you heard that it was good for you. By Thursday you're never going to eat it again, because you heard in another report that it's bad for you. Now what are you supposed to do with this information?



Often it's difficult to navigate the health messages that you get from the news. Many of the complexities of the science behind a report don't fit easily in the average news article. One thing that helps is knowing more about the original study. This can help you make a more educated decision about the strength of the study's findings.

How many people were in the study? If there were only a few people in the study, the findings may be weak or even a fluke. It can make a difference if findings were based upon 20 young people at the same hospital versus 2,000 people of various ages from around the country.

Has the study been published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal?

The fact that the study's been published in a reputable journal means that the findings have gone through additional scrutiny by the editors of the journal and experts in the field (peers of the scientists writing the article).

Were humans the subjects of the study? Reporters often write about things that are in the early stages of development. This makes for interesting news. Yet, if something was effective in mice or monkeys, the findings may not always translate to humans.

How long a period did the study cover? Sometimes a study is just a snapshot of 2 or 3 months, while others cover many years. This should be taken into consideration when evaluating the findings from a study. A snapshot might be just right for certain health or medical issues; others need more time to evaluate the full impact of the effects of a drug or other substance.

Who sponsored the research? A study sponsored by an unbiased source, like a government agency, may seem more credible than one funded by the company that's also advertising how effective their product is.

How long was the effect? A news article may talk about how a treatment extended the lives of people affected by a particular condition without giving the full details of the study. Looking more closely, you may find that it extended their lives only weeks or months, not years.

Remember: Find out more about the study, if you can, to get the big picture. You may also want to speak with your health care provider. You'll need solid information before making any drastic lifestyle changes. □



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