It’s easy to get complacent about getting in your car and driving. You take the same routes so often, it might feel like your car knows the way without you. If only. Think of all the things you could get done if this were the case!

The fact is driving needs our full attention. We need to be alert and fully awake, even if the trip we are making is our regular commute to the office. Unfortunately, another fact is that about 1 in 3 Canadians are chronically sleep deprived, and although driving while exhausted may seem relatively harmless, it has serious consequences.

Drowsy driving is dangerous because sleep deprivation can have similar effects on your body as drinking alcohol according to the National Sleep Foundation. Being awake for 18 hours straight makes you drive like you have a blood alcohol level of .05 (for reference, .08 is considered drunk). If you’ve been awake for a full 24 hours and drive—say, after a night where you just couldn’t fall asleep—it’s like you have a blood alcohol level of .10.

Being awake for 18 hours straight makes you drive like you have a blood alcohol level of .05 (for reference, .08 is considered drunk).

Sleep deprivation negatively impacts alertness and reaction times, but more recent studies have concluded that a wider range of brain functions are disrupted by sleep loss, including attention, working memory, and emotional processing. The brain becomes less stable the longer you are awake, diminishing your ability to focus your cognitive resources where they are needed.

In other words, it’s time you thought about getting yourself to bed at a decent hour. Working into the wee hours to alleviate the stress of a deadline will not actually help you when it comes to falling asleep. In fact, sitting at your computer or tablet for an extended period of time in the evening exposes you to blue light, the type of light emitted by common electronic devices which can disturb circadian rhythms by decreasing melatonin production.

You are likely to have more trouble falling asleep, thereby defeating any purpose of staying up late.

Most of us know that getting a good night’s sleep is important, but too few of us actually make sleeping a priority. For many of us with sleep debt, we’ve forgotten what “being really, truly rested” feels like.

The National Sleep foundation released the results of its recent study that took more than two years of research to complete. It’s an update to its most-cited guidelines on how much sleep you really need at each age. It states that most healthy adults need between 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night to function at their best. Visit sleepfoundation.org for more information.
Find your happiness at the office

All work environments can’t be Charlie’s chocolate factory, but that doesn’t mean you can’t bring your own joy to the office. Happiness is mostly a choice. You can choose to be happy at work. It sounds simple, but it’s often difficult to put into action. Remember, your choices at work largely define your experience.

Here are a few more tips from businessinsider.com

**Think of your professional development**

Put your professional development first — know how you can grow and learn in your company. Professional development can be anything from taking classes to knowing how to become a good manager.

**Figure out what truly motivates you**

Many individuals are unhappy at work because they haven’t tapped into what fundamentally motivates them — they lack a sense of meaningfulness in their job. Think deeply about how you define enjoyment, success, and fulfillment, and see how that relates to what you do at work. Perhaps there’s a disconnect between what really motivates you and how you relate to either the projects you engage in or the teams you’re involved with.

**Take 10 to 15 minute breaks**

Take 10-15 minutes for yourself — whether it’s meditation, taking a walk, stretching, or listening to music. Allowing yourself more “you” time can help you feel more grounded and excited about work, as well as less stressed.

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**Tips to help lower your kids’ intake of sugary drinks**

(NC) Did you know that sugary drinks are the main source of sugars in the diets of Canadians? Drinking sugary drinks may lead to increased risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cavities in children.

**Sugary drinks can include:**

- iced tea
- fruit juice
- soft drinks
- sports drinks
- energy drinks
- fruit-flavoured drinks and punches
- sweetened plant-based beverages
- flavoured waters with added sugars
- sweetened milks like chocolate milk
- sweetened hot or cold tea, coffee, hot chocolate and other specialty drinks.

It may not seem easy to get your kid, teen or tween to drink fewer sugary drinks, but here are a few tips:

- Reduce the amount of sugary drinks available at home.
- Encourage them to make healthy drink choices when they are away from home.
- Offer water or carbonated water with meals and snacks.
- Brainstorm as a family ways to flavour water with fruits and herbs.
- Hop on the do-it-yourself trend. Make up a pitcher of unsweetened iced tea with your favourite herbal tea. Or create a signature infused water concoction. Use sparkling water to add some fizz.
- Serve healthier alternatives when hosting friends and family. Offer water and a variety of fruit and herb-infused water, or sparkling water.
Tips to keep your downtime safe and healthy

The home is often seen as a sanctuary: a place where we can escape. Maybe you’re looking forward to watching a movie or to having family and friends over for supper. Maybe you’re planning on finishing up a few nagging chores or taking some well-deserved quiet time to curl up with a book after a busy day.

No matter your reason to stay inside, Health Canada recommends taking a few simple steps to make sure that your home is a healthy one and that it stays that way.

Remove your shoes or boots at the entryway. It all begins at the front door. It’s not just about the mud and dirt you could be tracking in – removing your footwear can also help keep harmful bacteria and chemicals from being spread around your home.

Ventilate your home. Open your windows on a nice day. After all, there’s nothing like a breath of fresh air. You can keep your indoor air cleaner by turning on the stove hood fan while you’re cooking or the bathroom fan while you’re in the shower. Also, make sure you have working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms helping you keep your home safe and healthy.

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This simple activity is the most effective thing you can do to protect yourself against a number of infections and illnesses.

Read the label. Even if you’re only topping up the windshield washer fluid in your car, make sure you read and follow label directions, paying close attention to hazard symbols. All household chemical products need to be used, stored and disposed of properly. Keep products with hazard symbols out of sight and out of reach of children.

Find more useful tips at canada.ca/healthy-home.

Ways to steer clear of a toxic co-worker

Your workplace is filled with personalities from the sunny sunshine people to the downright miserable. The ones we should watch out for are those downright miserable “toxic” colleagues. They can zap your energy and cause unnecessary stress. Try not to let the toxic folks poison your life. Here are a few tips:

Realize your co-worker is not worried about how you are affected

Difficult people often blame everyone but themselves when a problem arises. You might think that you can reason with them, but it won’t do any good. Instead, redirect yourself toward the positive. Think about everything you enjoy about your job, and talk about those things with other people.

Rise above

Don’t allow yourself to be dragged down by irrational behaviour. Focus on maintaining your own emotional and intellectual condition rather trying to shift the toxic person’s way of thinking or behaving. Don’t get pulled down by the chaos.

Physically distance yourself

Being around a negative, miserable or unstable person can start to rub off. Before you know it, you’re feeling some of those ways yourself. So, if at all possible, try to physically distance yourself from this person as much as you can. It will make it a lot easier to apply some of the other strategies if you limit your exposure or at least reduce your proximity.

Leave work at work

You probably aren’t going to be able to change the toxic person you’re dealing with at work, but you can control how you react to them. When your workday is done, leave the toxicity behind. Don’t obsess about the situation. Other people are going to do what they’re going to do. It doesn’t have to upset you.
How to be part of the team

Being a team player seems to be the way to work these days, and that’s fine if you are happy working with others, but what if you are someone who prefers to work solo?

It can be hard to be an introvert, or even just someone who prefers to work alone in an environment where being an extrovert is frequently associated with leadership and success.

However, you can thrive when you’re not exactly what most people would call a team player. Here are some ideas for you to ponder:

Focus on your listening skills

Most people think that you have to talk a lot in order to “contribute” in a meaningful way to a team task. But remember, not all contributions come in the form of conversation. Being a good listener is just as important in business as anything else. So, if you find yourself in a team environment and don’t feel like jumping in too much, focus on listening and understanding others’ points of view instead.

Offer solutions

Being a good team player is mostly about attitude. You don’t have to be something you’re not to get along well with others at work. Focus on being positive rather than negative. One way to stay positive is to aim to offer more solutions than problems at work. If you find yourself complaining about “yet another team exercise”, notice it, and step back. The next time you contribute, make sure you have something positive to say.

Schedule alone time

If you prefer working alone, be mindful of that when setting your schedule. For example, if you have a big meeting planned, go ahead and fist bump the group at the end of it, but no one says you have to carry on and go for lunch with everyone. Try to schedule a few hours for quiet and independent work in the afternoon. It might help to have that block to look forward to, and it will also help you recover and replenish your energy.

The relaxation response and stress

Back in 1975, Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School wrote a book called The Relaxation Response. The book is known to have introduced the idea of meditation into the mainstream consciousness as a means of lowering blood pressure and reducing internal and external stress.

It is the counteraction to the “flight or fight” response your body goes through when you feel you are in danger and start to panic.

So how can you trigger your relaxation response to help you get over feeling stressed? Here is a guided exercise from Dr. Benson’s book:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
5. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.
6. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them.
The truth revealed about AEDs and their use

Defibrillators are devices that restore a normal heartbeat by sending an electric pulse or shock to the heart. They are used to prevent or correct an arrhythmia, a heartbeat that is uneven or that is too slow or too fast. Defibrillators can also restore the heart’s beating if the heart suddenly stops.

An automated external defibrillator or AED is a portable, battery-operated device that a bystander can use. It checks heart rhythm and can send an electric shock to the heart to try to restore a normal rhythm.

AEDs are in many public spaces. They were developed to save the lives of people experiencing sudden cardiac arrest. Cardiac arrest is when a person’s heart suddenly stops beating. Unless treated within minutes, the person usually dies because blood is no longer being pumped to the brain and other parts of the body.

Defibrillation within three minutes of sudden cardiac arrest increases the chances of survival to 70%. Shock within one minute of collapse raises the survival rate to 90%.

Because the AED can play such a significant role in saving someone’s life, St. John Ambulance has debunked some myths that exist about its use.

**Myth #1: You need training to use an AED.**

AEDs are safe to use by people of all ages, with no previous training. Most AEDs have a voice-guided system that takes the user through a number of easy-to-follow steps, supported by pictures. Some even provide CPR instructions as well. However, AED training courses are offered as well to give someone confidence in case he or she is called upon to use one.

**Myth #2: AEDs are difficult to use.**

AEDs have come a long way and they are now so simple to use that even an untrained fourth grader can use one.

**Myth #3: Legally, I can’t use an AED on someone.**

Legislation in most provinces and territories across Canada protects individuals who use AEDs from liability when they are used in the context of saving a life, so don’t be afraid to intervene! The only provinces and territories without Good Samaritan laws are New Brunswick, Yukon, and Nunavut.

**Myth #4: I know CPR – that’s enough.**

CPR is very important, but CPR alone is not enough. The odds of survival reduce by as much as 10% every minute the heart is not beating after a sudden cardiac arrest or cardiac event. After 12 minutes without defibrillation, very few people survive.

Have more questions about AEDs? Contact your local St. John Ambulance branch.

Face the facts about oral health

(NC) Separating fact from fiction, particularly on the internet, can be difficult, even when it comes to your oral health.

Here is what you need to know according to dentalhygiene.canada.ca:

1. **Gum disease is not normal.**
   Red or bleeding gums may be a warning sign of gingivitis, the first stage of gum disease. When bacteria accumulate on your teeth and gums, you are at greater risk of infection. Fortunately, gingivitis can be reversed with improved oral hygiene at home, and it can be prevented in the first place by brushing twice daily and cleaning between the teeth.

2. **Even if your teeth look great and don’t hurt, they may not be healthy.**
   Regular dental hygiene care is important for the early detection and prevention of cavities and oral diseases. Often by the time there is pain, advanced disease is present. Early detection by a dental professional can prevent lengthy and costly treatments.

3. **Teeth whitening is safe if done properly.**
   Bleaching your teeth is not dangerous if it is done with careful planning and advice from your oral health professional. To keep your teeth safe, arrange for a full oral exam prior to tooth whitening and ask about the best bleaching options for you.

4. **Your oral health has an impact on your overall health.**
   Research shows that a healthy mouth contributes to a healthy body. Chronic gum disease is associated with cardiovascular and lung diseases and strokes, as well as diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. Improvements in oral hygiene care can reduce inflammation and improve overall health.
Stain removal 101

Grass.
Much like dye stains, grass stains contain a pigment that sticks to clothing fibres. The secret is to act fast, soaking the stain in cold water as soon as possible. Once the garment is really soaked with water, use a cleaning agent like white vinegar, rubbing alcohol or even bleach (if you’re dealing with whites) to treat the stain.

Red wine.
With a wine stain, it’s all about the dab - rubbing the stain can set it further. Dabbing complete, apply salt liberally to the stained area, let it dry and then wash with cold water and a mix of detergent and baking soda.

Lipstick.
Pre-treat lipstick stains with a solvent-based stain removal product (or a bit of liquid detergent). Allow the stain remover to work for at least 15 minutes and then wash the garment in the hottest water possible for the fabric – be sure to read the care label.

Sauces.
Apply dish detergent to the stain and rub with an ice cube. Once the stain has faded, blot it with a clean cloth soaked with vinegar and wash as usual.

Oil and grease.
Start by covering the stain in baby powder or cornstarch as quickly as possible – the powder will soak up much of the grease or oil. After about 30 minutes, dust off any excess powder and give the garment a wash on the hottest water-setting possible for the fabric.

Healthy energy drinks
Between work, meetings, cleaning, working out, and trying to have a life on top of all that, it’s no wonder you’re feeling a little worn out. Try these healthy drinks suggested by livestrong.com that can boost your energy levels:

Pomegranate Green Tea
Green tea gives a natural caffeine boost, but the additions of pomegranate juice and chia seeds both pack antioxidants and nutrients that will also rev the body’s engines. Brew a green tea bag in a mug with hot water. After letting it steep, remove the tea bag and stir in some pomegranate concentrate. Sweeten with honey and add chia seeds. Let the drink cool before pouring into a cup with ice.

Banana Shake
A banana shake is perfect for a post-workout boost. The milk and yogurt in a shake provide your body with protein and carbohydrates, which will help you bounce back from a hard workout. Bananas are also packed with potassium and magnesium, so they replenish electrolytes and improve muscle function. Make this tasty shake by putting banana, low-fat yogurt, milk, vanilla extract and ice cubes in a blender. Blend well and enjoy.

Simple ways to eat healthily
(NC) Healthy eating is more than the foods you eat. It’s also about where, when, why and how you eat. Here are a few ways you can start eating healthier right now:

1. Be mindful of your eating habits. Take time to eat and notice when you are hungry and when you are full.

2. Cook more often. Cooking and preparing food can support healthy eating habits.

3. Plan what you eat and involve others in planning and preparing meals. A little planning goes a long way in helping to develop and maintain healthy eating habits.

4. Eat meals with others. Enjoying healthy foods with family, friends, neighbours or co-workers is a great way to connect and add enjoyment to your life.

5. Make it a habit to eat a variety of healthy foods each day. Eat vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods. Among protein foods, choose those that come from plants more often. Protein foods include beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, lean meats and poultry, fish, shellfish, eggs, lower fat milk and lower fat dairy products.

6. Choose foods with healthy fats instead of saturated fat. Choosing foods that contain mostly healthy fats can help lower your risk of heart disease.

7. Limit highly processed foods. If you choose these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts.

8. Prepare meals and snacks using ingredients that have little to no added sodium, sugars or saturated fat.