Conflicts and criticism are not pleasant for anyone to deal with, regardless of your role at work. From boss to supervisor to employee, having to confront someone knowing that you will receive a full-on blast of negativity, denial and complaining is never a pleasant or an easy task, so many of us will simply avoid it altogether.

The most frustrating part is that you have a right to stand up for yourself and say something. Being the “nice guy” can in fact disable your team more than you know, according to Psychology Today. And imagine what situations like this does to your stress levels and self-esteem.

Having conflict—presenting a different point of view even when it is uncomfortable—is critical to team effectiveness. Diversity of thinking on a team is the source of innovation and growth.

If you find yourself shying away from conflict, use one of the following techniques to make it a little easier:

- **Before you approach the person you need to talk with, think of a goal you can both get behind so the conversation is win-win.** For example, when talking to the one nay-sayer on your team, try saying, “We all want to find a solution to get back on track” not “You need to call off your pit bull of an attitude, buddy.” Then, if the conversation goes off course, the goal is your home base. Keep coming back to it. If Mr. Negative gets defensive, remind him of the goal you both want: solve the problem.

- **Set the tone.** If you make it stone-cold serious and awkward, it will be. If you open with anger or defensiveness, it will end up as a fight. But if you ask casually and with genuine openness, you’ll have a real conversation.

- **Beware of being in it to win it.** Tough conversations only work if you both win. We treat others badly to get them to treat us better, which makes no sense for anyone involved. So to avoid lingering resentments and dirty looks, you must give up your goal of crushing the competition. Any loudmouth can “win” an argument. To be a true winner, you need to make everyone win. If you hear yourself saying slippery things like “Technically, you never said exactly that” or plotting to secretly tape the person so you can prove you’re right, both of you have already lost.

A touchy subject doesn’t have to equal conflict. It’s time to stop changing the subject, or distract, or tell everyone except the person we’re complaining about, and face the situation head on.
Managing chronic pain with mindfulness

If you suffer from chronic pain, you’re not alone. Individuals with chronic pain suffer on many levels, including debilitating anxiety.

If you’re pain-free at the moment, you may be worrying about when the next wave of pain will begin, how severe it will be, how long it will last and whether you can bear living with chronic pain forever. This is where mindfulness meditation can help. Mindfulness is a meditation technique that teaches you to concentrate on what’s happening now: your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. Basic mindfulness meditation entails following your natural, unforced breath while maintaining a relaxed but alert posture with your eyes fully or half closed. When your mind wanders, as it inevitably will, gently return your attention back to the breath.

“Leaning into the pain” is a mindfulness technique that is particularly useful when you’re experiencing pain. For this example, imagine that you are in the throes of a migraine. Rather than panicking, take a comfortable seated position, preferably in a dark, quiet room.

1. Bring yourself into the moment by closing your eyes and following your breath for a few minutes.
2. Locate the area(s) that hurt. Though it may feel like your entire head is in pain, as you calmly continue to breathe and focus, you’ll notice that your neck is in spasm, the base of your skull is pounding or that it feels like there’s an ice pick through your eye.
3. “Direct” your breath to the area(s) that hurts. This is different from regular mindfulness meditation wherein you follow the natural breath. For this exercise, you want to breathe more deeply and deliberately without trying to over expand your lungs.
   a. Breathe in and feel the breath move through your body to fill the area(s) that hurt.
   b. Gently and deliberately breathe out, feeling the breath leave the painful area(s).
4. If your attention wanders, simply return your focus to the breath.
5. In time, you may notice the location of your pain changes. When this happens, “send” your breath to the new location.

When you exhale, your body may release some, or even all, of the pain. You may hear gentle cracks and pops as tension is released from muscles, bones, and tendons, reducing your pain.

Try challenging yourself to achieve health, wellness goals

Sticking to a health and wellness regimen is never the easiest thing, especially if you are someone who needs to see instant results to stay motivated.

How about trying something like a little reward system to motivate yourself? It may take a little extra discipline on your part, but if you stick to it, you may not only find yourself feeling better at the end of the month, you can also savour the anticipation of your planned reward, and enjoy it once you have achieved your goals.

Try to make your “reward” something that will really make you want to stick to your plan. Maybe a special dinner in a fancy restaurant, or buying something for your home, or something you have always wanted to add to your wardrobe.

Here are a few ideas:

- Challenge yourself to get 7 hours of sleep per night for 14 nights. See how far you get. Perhaps if you only make it to 7 nights, you can still recognize your efforts. The important result here is the longer you manage to get your required sleep, the easier it will be for you to fall into a normal routine of a good night’s rest.
- Challenge yourself to take a 30 minute walk during lunch hour for 30 days, rain or shine. There are a few different ways you can achieve a nice brisk 30-minute walk. You can bundle up if it’s cold and walk outside, or make a couple of rounds of the floors in your office building. Just keep an eye on the time. If you can achieve this goal, you are also working on setting up a habit for yourself, and before long you will look forward to your lunch time stroll.
- Challenge yourself to try a different type of fruit or vegetable twice a week for the next month. Not only is this a great way to introduce yourself to new foods, it is a fun way to get those fruit and veggies into your diet.

If you don’t quite make it to the end of your targeted date, you can still be proud of the efforts you are making to stay healthy and be well. And if you reach your target; your reward is waiting!
Dread exercising? Consider trying water aerobics

Water aerobics is just what it sounds like: doing aerobic exercise while standing in water. Many places with pools, from commercial gyms to local community centres, offer water aerobics classes. Even if you are someone who hates exercising, water aerobics might be a surprisingly good fit for you. Here are a few reasons why you should consider taking a water aerobics class:

It’s very low impact
If you have joint problems, high-impact exercises like running and standard aerobics are nothing but painful, even if you are in great shape. But when you are surrounded and supported by water, you don’t feel the same crush of gravity making your joints grind and crash together. Water aerobics is excellent for anyone recovering from an injury or with a chronic condition that causes joint pain such as arthritis or lupus. Pool exercise is popular with seniors for the same reason.

It feels graceful
Working out when you have a lot of weight to lose can feel miserable. The pool is a completely different environment. You do have to wear that swimsuit, but once in the water you will feel much less conspicuous. More important, the support of the water around you means that you don’t feel your weight dragging at you with every move. You can move more easily and feel graceful as you exercise. No one can see whether you stay on the beat, and there is no danger of falling if you step wrong.

It’s not just for elderly ladies
Aqua aerobics is popular with seniors because it’s easier on stiff and arthritic joints. Don’t let the stereotype of older ladies in flowered swim caps put you off, though. It’s a great workout for men as well as women, and young as well as old. If you don’t like swimming or don’t do it well, don’t worry; almost all of the exercises are performed standing up in waist-deep water. And if you are the kind of athlete that goes trail running or mountain biking, a water aerobics class is a nice change of pace that will still challenge you.

It burns hundreds of calories in one workout
In water aerobics, you are constantly pushing against the resistance of the water, which is much thicker than air. This means that even small, simple movements, negligible on land, burn calories and build muscle. If you are someone who skips exercising due to lack of time, pool exercise is efficient, allowing you to get more out of each workout. Just one or two classes each week will make a big difference in your cardio health.

Cold-weather tips for arthritis sufferers

As the weather gets colder, you may find that your arthritis bothers you more than usual. These tips will help you beat arthritic symptoms throughout the winter months.

Wrap up in layers.
- Dressing warmly can really help reduce your symptoms, especially when you’re out and about. Don’t try to tough out the cold weather in your autumn wardrobe -- it’s time to break out the down jackets and the thick gloves. Loose layers trap warm air close to your body and will help you to feel warmer. Thermal under-layers are great for keeping you toasty in all weathers, whether you’re indoors or out.

Stay hydrated
- Dehydration can make your symptoms worse, drying out your joints and leading to additional discomfort. Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day to reduce the stress on your joints. It doesn’t have to be water -- hot tea is very soothing in colder weather and will help keep your fluid levels up.

Keep moving
- The last thing you want to do when your arthritis is bothering you is exercise. Unfortunately, staying put can actually make things worse. Gentle, low-impact exercise is crucial to managing arthritis. Look for activities that you can do indoors, such as tai chi. Swimming is also an excellent activity for arthritis sufferers.

Soak away your aches and pains
- A hot bath can be very helpful for arthritis sufferers. As well as helping to reduce inflammation, raising your core temperature will help you feel more comfortable.

Watch your vitamin D levels
- Many people don’t get enough vitamin D, especially in the winter months when sunlight is often in short supply. Boosting your vitamin D intake with supplements can help reduce symptoms and improve your mobility.

One final point that can’t really be overstressed: you don’t have to deal with arthritis alone. Talk to your doctor or other healthcare providers about therapies that might help your condition.

There are also voluntary organizations that can help you find appropriate treatment if you’re struggling with your symptoms.
Perfectionism is more than high standards

Are you a person that sets the bar high, not only for others but also for yourself? Sure, having high standards can be considered a good thing, but what if these high standards are making a mess of things in your daily life?

According to Anxiety Canada, you could be dealing with perfectionism. Perfectionism involves a tendency to set standards that are so high they are impossible to meet, or are only met with great difficulty. Perfectionists tend to believe that anything short of perfection is horrible, and that even minor imperfections will lead to catastrophe.

If you have trouble figuring out whether you have a problem with perfectionism, Anxiety Canada suggests asking yourself these questions:

1. Do I have trouble meeting my own standards?
2. Do I often feel frustrated, depressed, anxious, or angry while trying to meet my standards?
3. Have I been told that my standards are too high?
4. Do my standards get in the way? For example, do they make it difficult for me to meet deadlines, finish a task, trust others, or do anything spontaneously?

If answering yes describes you, it might be time to do a little self-reflection.

Perfectionism can make you feel depressed, frustrated, anxious, and even angry, especially if you constantly criticize yourself for not doing a good enough job after spending a lot of time and effort on a task.

Because adults with perfectionism are often very critical of themselves, one of the most effective ways to overcome this is to replace self-critical thoughts with more realistic and helpful statements such as:

- “Nobody is perfect!”
- “All I can do is my best!”
- “Making a mistake does not mean I’m stupid or a failure. It only means that I am like everyone else – human.
- “Everyone makes mistakes!”
- “It’s okay not to be pleasant all the time. Everyone has a bad day sometime.”
- “It’s okay if some people don’t like me. No one is liked by everyone!”

It is a good idea to practise these helpful statements regularly. Even if you do not believe them right away, enough repetition will turn positive realistic thoughts into a habit, and help crowd out the negative self-talk.

If you find yourself continually struggling with feelings of failure because of perfectionism, it may be time to ask for a little help. Talk with your health care professional.

Take the time to find the right therapist for you

So, you have decided to take the advice of friends and family, and all of those self-help articles that suggest you contact a professional for help, and have made the call. Now comes the question; how do you know if you have chosen the right therapist?

Both the idea of talk therapy and the process of finding the right therapist can be intimidating prospects. What should you ask once you start sessions? There are no dumb questions in therapy — and if you think there are, those might be the exact questions you should consider asking.

Here are a few tips from psychologytoday.ca:

- Researching a therapist is very important. It is not only important to conduct research on therapists, but to also research and familiarize yourself with the types of therapies that are offered. Common types of therapy include individual therapy, group therapy, family therapy, and couples therapy.

- If you are seeing a therapist for a particular issue, look for therapists who have experience in that area. If you had cancer, you would see an oncologist and/or an ophthalmologist; why treat your therapy experience any differently? There are therapists who specialize in a variety of issues; some may specialize in several. Look for experience to find your unique fit.

- If you are not comfortable with the therapist you have chosen, do not feel bad about changing therapists. You may need to see a few before you find the therapist that is the right fit for you. You should continue your search until you feel you are understood and accepted. Signs that you may need to change your therapist include feeling uncomfortable, not feeling heard, or when your therapist talks more than listens or constantly gives advice or directives.

It takes a lot of courage to admit we can’t face our issues alone. Make the best decision possible by taking the necessary time, and doing the appropriate research to choose a therapist who is right for you.
Peppermint tea combines health and taste

Of all the herbal teas available, peppermint offers one of the most attractive combinations of health benefits and taste. Here are some of the excellent advantages peppermint tea can bring.

Mental boost
The pungent aroma of peppermint tea might give an instant galvanizing boost to your mood, but this is more than a superficial effect. Studies have shown that when taken regularly, peppermint improves memory, boosts concentration, and sharpens all-around mental functioning.

Colds and flu
Peppermint’s high menthol content may help clear sinuses and soothe throats. There’s also growing evidence that peppermint could have antiviral effects which may help combat fever.

Aches and pains
Peppermint contains both natural analgesics and anti-spasmodic agents. These work to possibly help reduce muscular aches and pains, particularly those caused by flu. Also, some sufferers of restless legs syndrome find drinking peppermint tea in the evening can help reduce their symptoms.

Better exercise and stamina
Peppermint may benefit weight loss. It can boost blood circulation which naturally delivers more oxygen to your muscles. This means you might be able to exercise for longer without tiring, possibly burning more calories along the way.

Possible assistant to tuberculosis treatment
Some studies have shown that peppermint tea may help to reduce the inflammation tuberculosis causes, easing breathing.

Soothing for toothache
Warm peppermint tea may provide relief from toothache thanks to menthol’s numbing effect. Added to that, it might help reduce the inflammation and irritation of early-stage gingivitis. Both effects are a helpful band-aid until you can arrange dental treatment.

Stress and headaches
Peppermint offers a mild muscular and mental relaxant which may help to alleviate stress and tension headaches.

Health benefits of the pineapple

Pineapples are one of the most popular fruits in the world. Despite their rather unusual appearance, they’re very healthy and nutritious. As such, they’re increasingly popular among health-conscious individuals with a preference for water-based foods. Researchers are just beginning to take a serious look at this delicious tropical fruit, but current findings suggest pineapples have quite a bit to offer the average human body. Here are some health benefits of the pineapple.

Lots of vitamin C
According to nutritionists, just one cup of pineapple contains a whopping 131% of the daily recommended value of vitamin C. Vitamin C is needed to help the body fight off invading viruses. It also helps build stronger skin that can help defend against infection.

Healthier eyes. Pineapples contain beta carotene which is highly beneficial to the eyes.

Stronger bones
Pineapples are rich in manganese, which is a critical trace mineral the body needs for building bones and connective tissues. A little-known fact: You can get 73% of your body’s total manganese requirement in just a single cup of pineapple.

Helps improve digestion
Bromelain is a protein-digesting enzyme typically found in the core or stem of the pineapple. It helps the body’s digestive process by breaking down protein particles in food. Bromelain also helps regulate secretions in the pancreas, while neutralizing the acids in fluids. Pineapples also provide plenty of dietary fibre to keep the digestive tract clean.

Overall, pineapples are one of the best foods you can add to your diet. The high concentration of vitamin C alone should be reason enough to make sure you pick one up next time you’re at the grocery store. In an age where some of the processed foods we’ve relied on for years are now known to be harmful to our bodies, it’s always good to know the health benefits of the pineapple offer such a delicious and healthy alternative.
Healthy habits for the new year

With the start of the new year, many of us are thinking of ways to make healthier changes in our daily lives. Here are some ways to be mindful of your eating habits in your day-to-day routine.

- Tune into your hunger cues. Notice why you’re eating. Are you eating because you’re actually hungry? Or are you reaching for food when you’re feeling bored, sad or upset, or maybe when you’re just craving something sweet or salty? Be aware of when you’re feeling full.

- Enjoy meals with all your senses. Pay attention to the colours, textures, tastes and smells of food and beverages. Listen to the crunch of a ripe red apple or take in the wonderful aroma of a homemade soup filled with colourful veggies.

- Eat with others. Connect with others through food every day. Whether you’re having a quick breakfast at home, sharing recipes over lunch at the office or cooking a busy weeknight’s dinner with the family, turn off the TV and other distractions. Take time to enjoy mealtimes together and catch up on the day’s events.

Beets gotta beat

What superfoods should be a part of your diet this year? Here are two that experts agree will add a little zing to your step:

Beets, like most vegetables, are packed with many familiar and healthy nutrients. They are low in calories and a good source of folate, magnesium, vitamin C, and fibre. But what really sets beets apart are the lesser-known—but highly beneficial—nutrients they contain. Compounds in beets—such as nitrates, betalains, and betaine—have been studied for their positive effects on oxidative stress, inflammation and cardiovascular health.

Serve beets roasted in a salad or cold-pressed in a juice concoction.

Avocados are the perfect addition to almost any meal: High in healthy fats, fibre, and nutrients like vitamin B and E. Healthy fats support our brains, hormones, and keep us full, satiated, and balanced. Spread them on toast or toss some into a smoothie.

Warning signs of caregiver burnout

With a growing population that is aging, more and more of us are becoming caregivers. But this responsibility is having negative consequences for many of those who provide this unpaid and often unrecognized support.

According to the Canadian Carers Pulse Survey, 69% of respondents reveal caregiving has taken a toll on their emotional health, while more than half said it affects their physical health.

Signs you may have caregiver burnout include:

- You can’t fall asleep or you frequently wake up during the night.
- You experience a lack of energy during the day.
- You feel impatient or are easily agitated.
- You have trouble concentrating on simple tasks.
- You have stopped doing activities you once found enjoyable.
- You are more socially isolated from friends and family.

If you see some of these signs in yourself, perhaps it’s time for you to seek out support for yourself.

Interventions can come in different forms like receiving help to get things done and assistance with housework, bathing or other tasks.

The caregiver also needs support to deal with the stress of watching someone they care about deteriorate to help them cope with the emotional struggles that are part of the journey.

These supports can come from both professionals as well as peer caregivers. Every situation is different and supports should be built around need. There are a variety of services and resources that can help. The key is to find one that suits your family.

Start with talking to your doctor or your local health agency to find out the best course of action. You deserve a helping hand.