Spring Cleaning Spruces up Your Home and Helps Your Mental Health Shine

Release Date:
Monday, March 8, 2010 5:30 am PST

Terms:

Dateline City:
LOS ANGELES

LOS ANGELES--(BUSINESS WIRE)--The month of March brings with it the official start of spring – a season associated with renewal and romance, and, on a less lyrical level – with dusting, scrubbing, and otherwise engaging in the roll-up-your-sleeves ritual known as spring cleaning. While heavy-duty housework hardly sounds inviting, Health Net, Inc. (NYSE: HNT) wants to spread the word that spring cleaning not only results in a tidy abode, but also brings with it mental health benefits.

Studies have shown that a dirty, disorganized home can harbor health threats in the form of mold, bacteria and clutter-caused injuries, but such an environment also can negatively impact mental health, explains Ian Shaffer, M.D., chief medical officer of MHN, Health Net’s behavioral health subsidiary. “A thorough spring cleaning definitely brings with it a feel-good sense of satisfaction,” he adds, “and the physical exertion of dusting, vacuuming and scrubbing has been found to reduce stress and anxiety.”

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The housework-happiness connection

Shaffer points out that, while the physical benefits of exercise are well known, there’s mounting evidence that exercise – even in the form of housework – brings with it mental health benefits. In fact, one study – conducted by University College London – found that as little as 20 minutes of housework per week reduced feelings of psychological distress. It was further found that the risk of mental health problems was reduced by one-fifth among those engaging in just 20 minutes of housework weekly.

“Exercise is known to boost mental health,” says Shaffer, “and house-cleaning activities are certainly a form of exercise. A bigger activity, like a top-to-bottom spring cleaning, helps you to feel organized and in control, and those feelings definitely result in reduced stress.”

The chores-calories connection

Doing housework not only lifts your spirits and lowers your stress level, but – as an added bonus – you also burn calories in the process. The American Heart Association categorizes housework as “moderate exercise,” and says that a person weighing 150 pounds who engages in 30 minutes of household chores can expect to burn the following:

- Cleaning a bathroom – 200 calories
- Doing laundry – 133 calories
- Making beds – 130 calories
- Washing windows – 125 calories
- Vacuuming – 123 calories
- Ironing – 70 calories
- Dusting – 50 calories

Shaffer notes, “Household chores alone are unlikely to keep you physically fit, but this, along with other daily tasks, provides a portion of the physical exercise we all need. If you combine these activities with a structured exercise program, the results can be very positive.”

Stay organized after spring cleaning

With the satisfaction of a successful spring cleaning behind you, Shaffer cautions against returning to one’s previously disorganized ways. “Staying organized,” he says, “encourages the good kind of stress.” In fact, studies have shown that a feeling of control – a feeling that comes with being organized – is key to whether stress will serve as a positive force that fuels creativity and optimism or if it will serve as a negative force accompanied by a sense of helplessness and pessimism.
Beyond optimism, being organized brings with it a bounty of other benefits. Shaffer points to three:

- **Reduced time pressure** – Among the greatest sources of stress is time pressure, i.e., so much to do, so little time. While being organized doesn't add hours to the day, it does enable you to make the most of the 24 hours in each day. Organized individuals don't waste time wondering what work project is due when, or where a needed item – from an unpaid bill to an uncashed check – might be hiding. The time saved can be spent on any number of stress-busting activities, such as exercising or preparing a healthy meal.

- **Disorganization makes it hard to see things in their components.** Failing to see the parts leads to a few of the whole that can be very overwhelming and at times will lead to immobilization and people failing to act and move forward.

- **No disorganization domino effect** – As a general rule, disorganization creates a ripple effect, impacting not only the offender, but also those around him or her. If you're disorganized, the fallout can extend to family, friends as well as co-workers, and a tension-filled environment can become the order of the day. Conversely, while organization doesn't guarantee harmony and happiness, it unquestionably helps.

**About Health Net**

Health Net, Inc. is among the nation's largest publicly traded managed health care companies. Its mission is to help people be healthy, secure and comfortable. The company's health plans and government contracts subsidiaries provide health benefits to approximately 6.1 million individuals across the country through group, individual, Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE and Veterans Affairs programs. Health Net's behavioral health subsidiary, MHN, provides mental health benefits to approximately 6.5 million individuals in all 50 states. The company's subsidiaries also offer managed health care products related to prescription drugs, and offer managed health care product coordination for multi-region employers and administrative services for medical groups and self-funded benefits programs.

For more information on Health Net, Inc., please visit the company's Web site at www.healthnet.com.