Everyone has relationships. Whether we're born into them or acquire them later in life, each relationship – be it with family, friends, co-workers, or significant others – has a powerful influence on us. Healthy relationships are key to a positive life, but how do you know if it is healthy?

**RELATIONAL CHECKUP**

Keeping your relationships healthy is both possible and necessary. Experts conclude that healthy relationships share basic commonalities, including: communication, boundaries, respect and trust. Consider running a "diagnostic" on the relationships in your life with these helpful questions.

**COMMUNICATION**

- Is there open, mutual dialogue in good times and during conflict?
- Are thoughts and feelings expressed? Do you feel listened to and safe to share your ideas and emotions?

**BOUNDARIES**

- Do you maintain a life outside this relationship? Are you able to spend time with other people or engaging in your favorite hobbies?
- Can you exercise good self-care with this person in your life? Are you able to keep to your values and goals?

**RESPECT**

- Are decisions reached jointly? Is each person willing to compromise when needed?

- Do you celebrate each other’s successes and comfort each other’s losses?
- Are there more good times than bad with this person?

**TRUST**

- Is technology used to constantly check up on each other?
- Is there a foundation of confidence, or are there accusations of lying and misconduct?

**BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

Just like our physical bodies need upkeep, so do our relationships. If all indications point to a healthy relationship, keep up the good work. However, if there are negative patterns it’s worth talking with a counselor, religious leader or mentor for sound advice. Temporary or permanent separations are sometimes necessary.

**LOVING YOURSELF**

As much as we desire healthy connections, the priority relationship is to yourself. The extent you offer yourself love, grace and acceptance is the amount you can extend to another. Knowing the values you treasure will help steer you in making relational choices. Positive self-talk teaches you to recognize your value and voice. When we’re able to respect ourselves we begin to develop clear, strong personal and relational boundaries. There’s only one you, so treat yourself well!
Stress is everywhere. Relationships and events may add positive or negative stress to our daily lives. One way to cope with life’s pressure is to practice mindfulness. A popular Eastern method for centuries, mindfulness is now picking up momentum here in the West.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?
Mindfulness is the discipline of focusing your attention, helping you to embrace the present moment with acceptance and curiosity. Mindfulness steers you away from judgmental thoughts, distractions, multi-tasking, and fixating on the past or future. It is a new perspective on experience, and opens your senses to the world within and around you.

MEDITATIVE BENEFITS
How do you feel about improved sleep, less stress, and lower blood pressure? These are just a few of the many positive benefits of a mindful life. Practicing mindfulness also helps fight against depression, anxiety, and other mental health symptoms. Redirecting your thoughts can help you feel better about yourself, practice good self-care and raise your mood.

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS
Everyone is unique, and mindfulness meditations will look different from one person to the next. The main goal is focused relaxation by paying attention to your body, thoughts and senses.

• Focus and breathe - Sit quietly and pay attention to your natural breathing. Try repeating a word or phrase to bring your thoughts to attention. If your mind begins to wander, don’t judge yourself. Gently redirect your thoughts back to the exercise.

• Notice body sensations - Without judgment, focus on your body’s subtle feelings. Pay attention to any external sensations, such as sounds, sights, touch and taste. Stay in the present moment, breathe and direct your mind away from any negative or stressful thoughts.

• Persistence - Our lives are adjusted to a fast-paced, technological world. Stay encouraged, as mindfulness techniques will take time to develop. While it may feel awkward initially, a mindfulness habit pays dividends of greater self-awareness and happiness.

PEAK PERFORMANCE
Maintaining Health as You Age

Many of our yearly resolutions might include staying active, eating healthy, or drinking more water. While these daily choices are certainly beneficial, have you ever considered taking a more preventative approach to healthy goal-setting? Specifically, when was your last checkup with a primary care physician?

PREVENTATIVE HEALTH
Do we really need to go to the doctor if we’re not sick? Absolutely! Having a regular checkup is the most proactive way to watch for any health issues. Early detection is often key toward successful treatment.

As we age, our bodies need a little more attention and care. Consider the following cancer screenings as guidelines.

MEN
• Prostate - Concerned? Ask your doctor. Unless you are having symptoms, you likely do not need to have a screening.

VACCINES
A common misconception about aging and immunizations is the “one and done” principle. While a vaccine received in childhood might be sufficient for life, there are exceptions. Specific needs are determined by age, lifestyle, travel destinations, high-risk activities, and previously received vaccines. Immunity can also diminish with age, so a booster shot, such as the Tdap, is worth considering.

Remember, it’s a good rule of thumb to keep records of your screenings, test results and immunizations. In case you move or change doctors, having a quick reference guide to this information is helpful. Preventative, proactive healthcare is a great tool toward a healthy aging process.
The abuse of prescription opioid painkillers has been in the news a lot lately and it is considered a national epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control. In 2015, more than 33,000 people died of overdoses associated with prescription and illicit opioids. These include hydrocodone, oxycodone, morphine, codeine, fentanyl and the illegal drug, heroin. Overdose deaths from prescription opioids now exceed deaths from both heroin and cocaine combined!

Opioids are often used to help relieve pain. They work by lowering the number of pain signals your body sends to your brain and by changing how your brain responds to pain. Doctors usually prescribe opioids to relieve pain from toothaches and injuries.

Opioids are usually safe when they are used correctly, but many people misuse opioids and can become addicted. They develop a tolerance and need increasing amounts of the drug to get the same effect. The overuse of prescription opioids can even lead to heroin use.

Are you at risk? Consider the following factors:

- Personal or family history of addiction or substance abuse
- Any other addiction
- Anxiety or depression
- Long-term use of prescription opioids
- If you are prescribed an opioid, please follow these safety practices:
  - Safe Storage: Opioid Medications need to be stored securely, preferably as securely as you would lock up a firearm in your home.
  - Safe Disposal: Once an individual is finished taking an opioid painkiller, they should seek a safe disposal opportunity in the community and not keep these medications for later.

Opioid use results in profound biochemical changes in the brain, making this addiction challenging to overcome. Recovery from opioid dependence can require long-term treatment, including behavioral therapy and medication. Medication includes Methadone, Buprenorphine, Naltrexone and Naloxone.

If you are concerned about your use or that of a loved one, contact a counselor at Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at (408) 241-7772 and/or your doctor. Help is available.

For further information visit this helpful link, http://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment. Don't go through it alone!

The County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a labor-management sponsored, confidential, professional resource that provides counseling, assessment and referral services to County employees and their families who want help in solving personal and/or work-related problems.

When people are suffering from problems, it is easy to lose perspective. Life may seem confused and difficult for a time. Work performance may be negatively affected. If you have any questions or to schedule a counseling appointment, please call EAP at (408) 241-7772.
SOUND FINANCES
Are Financial Planners Worth It?

No one can manage your money better than you, right? While this may or may not be true, having a trusted advisor with financial expertise is a major asset. A financial planner – also known as a financial advisor – works with individuals to manage their finances. They also advise on investments, savings, insurance, taxes and other financial matters.

SELECTING A FINANCIAL PLANNER

When it comes to money, you want to work with someone you can trust. The following checklist can help you determine a good fit for you and your money.

- **Education/Certifications** - Inquire about their experience, education, and if they are nationally certified. Many times, this information can easily be found on their website.
- **Fees** - Be sure to ask how much you will be paying. Some ask for a fixed fee and others base payment on the amount of time spent with you. Other financial planners receive pay that is based on a percentage of your assets managed by them.
- **Accessibility** - How often would you like to meet with your financial advisor? Will you interact with them personally or an assistant? Choose someone that will work with your desired methods.

WORTH IT?

There are certainly times to consider meeting with a financial advisor. Major life changes are usually wise times to consult with an unbiased third-party. Think about choosing a financial planner during any of these life fluctuations:

- **Legal changes to relational status** - A new marriage or divorce is an emotional time. A financial planner can educate you on realistic and sustainable choices.
- **Large financial gifts** - Unless you plan on stuffing it in your mattress, ask for wisdom when receiving a large sum of money. A financial advisor can show you the best course of action for your cold, hard cash.
- **Retirement** - When considering retirement, schedule a sit-down meeting – the sooner, the better.
- **End-of-life planning** - Estate and beneficiary planning may not be your area of expertise. Talk to an advisor to help alleviate stress and gain some peace during a potentially difficult time.

Though partnering with a financial planner isn’t free, the pay-off is something money can’t buy. Less stress, more time to enjoy what you love and a return on your money spent is a worthwhile investment.