Better Health through Stress Management

Components of stress management

- Taking care of your body
  - Exercise
  - Nutrition
  - Sleep
- Reducing identifiable stressor
  - Reducing stressors you might not have been aware of
- Developing habit to incorporate stress management techniques in your daily routines

The Generalized Stress Response

- Physical response to a real or perceived threat
- Also known as the “flight or fight” response
- This starts a chain reaction of hormonal releases flooding the body with Adrenalin
- Physical effects of stress can be severe:
  - High blood pressure, heart attacks and stroke
  - Immune suppression: increased colds and flu
  - Gastro-intestinal problems: ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome
  - Muscle tension: migraines TMJ-disease
- Sustained adrenalin levels results in the depletion of Serotonin in your brain.
- These chemical changes in your brain result in depression

Andrew Weil: “8 Weeks to Optimum Health”

- Advocates making small changes, then adding and expanding on those every week for 8 weeks
- Make a list of small measurable goals
- Prioritize
- Implement the first 1-2 items on your list
- Once those changes no longer feel “new”, add 2-3 more
- Acknowledge and embrace what you are not willing to give up
Taking care of Your Body

Exercise and physical fitness

Monthly fitness evaluation

- Walking (time + heart rate) 29 minutes/1 mile, Pulse below 140
- Push-ups & Curl-ups
- Standing up without using hands for support
- Getting up from the floor Weight:
- Waist size...less than half your height

Types of fitness /exercise

- Stamina – cardiovascular fitness
  - Walking (running is not recommended)
  - Bicycling – recumbent tricycle
  - Dancing - also improves memory
  - Swimming
  - Machines: rowing, stair stepping, elliptical trainer
- Flexibility and Balance (Yoga, Tai-Chi)
- Strength: Resistance training

Health Screening: “how long do I have to keep doing this?”

- Annual physical
- Colonoscopy. Colon ca develops over 10-15 years. Colonoscopy recommended every 10 years up to age 75
- Mammogram recommended every two years
- Pap smear: not needed if you have had 3 negatives in the past 10 years
- Prostate screening: every year if PSA is 2.5 or higher, every 2 years if below 2.5
- Vaccinations.
  - Flu vaccine: every yea
- Tetanus: Every 10 years (with Diphtheria and Pertussis)
- Pneumonia vaccine: Once – possibly booster in 5 – 10 years.
- Shingles vaccine: Once

**Nutrition**

*What you put into your body truly matters*

**Why bother eating right?**
- Reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, type-2 diabetes, bone loss, cancer, and anemia
- Maintain muscles, bones, organs in optimal condition
- Boost your immune system by eating a vitamin rich diet
- Keeps your brain active
- Provides you with steady energy

**Reduce or eliminate**
- Low-fat foods
- Sugar-free foods
- Diet drinks
- Sweetened drinks, soda, iced tea, Gatorade, etc.
- The white stuff: bleached and processed flour, sugar, and rice
- Foods with more than 8 ingredients on the label

**Food habits worth developing**
- Eat breakfast: Without fuel, your body will run on adrenalin
- Balanced meals and snacks will maintain energy all day
  - Carbohydrates last 2 hours
  - Proteins last 4 hours
  - Fats last 6 hours
- Organic food: Greater nutritional value, fewer undesirable chemicals
- Be colorful in your food choices.
- Drink filtered water: (“safe” does not mean “good for you”)

• Supplements: ask your health care provider
  o Digestive enzymes
  o Vitamins B6, B12, and D
  o Calcium
  o Probiotics
• Indulge your junk food cravings: Eat your favorite junk when you go out. Do not keep at home. Set a frequency for your indulgences

**Good news (if your doctor says OK)**
• Coffee: Regular or decaffeinated: Lowers the risk of heart disease, diabetes. May protect against or delay the onset of Alzheimer’s
• Wine and beer: Protects against heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancers. May interact with some medications
• Chocolate: Dark chocolate w./ 70% cocoa contains antioxidants (help fight cancer), lowers blood pressure, improves blood flow to the brain and heart and lowers ‘bad’ cholesterol.

**Weight Management**
• Stop stressing about your weight
• Get rid of the clothes that are too small
• Do not go on a diet. If your weight is impairing your health, make small permanent changes in your daily food habits

**Sleeping**

**Facts about sleep**
• We all need approximately 8 hours of sleep
• Good quality sleep includes cycles of REM and non-REM sleep.
• Senior tend to have less deep sleep and more awakenings during the night
• Sleep time is linked to an individual’s circadian rhythm which changes throughout the life span
Why sleep is important

- Physical restoration and repairing
  - Sleep deprivation increases risk of heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, depression and immune suppression
- Weight management:
  - Sleep deprivation makes you hungry
- Brain function
  - Sleep deprivation reduces concentration, judgment, attention, and memory
- Clearing of metabolic waste from the brain
  - Sleep deprivation causes accumulation of Beta-amyloid in the brain which is a factor in Alzheimer’s
- Managing daily input to the brain by sorting, discarding and retaining information according to importance

Developing good sleeping habits

- Regular schedule of going to bed and getting up
- Sleeping in a dark room
- Avoiding bright light including electronic screen before bed time
- Sleeping in a cool room
- Do not stay in bed when you are awake
- Avoid caffeine after 2 pm
- Avoid alcoholic night caps: interfere with the deeper stage of non-REM sleep

Reducing identifiable Stress

Uncertainties and concerns

- List your major concerns
  - Future health issues, including your death
  - Financial concerns
Future changes in living arrangement
- Gather information and consult with experts
- Look at both the best and the worst case scenarios.
- Plan for the worst case scenarios then make a plan B.
  - For health care: Advance Directives
  - For your death: make funeral plans and a last will and testament
  - For financials: a General Power of Attorney
  - For future living arrangement: choose your preferred facilities
- Communicate your decisions to those who need it.

Stressed about the world we live in? : stop feeling helpless
- Volunteer with service organizations
- Community service
- Joining organizations
- Making donations
- Writing letters and making calls

Mental and Emotional Well-being

Grief is a long term stressor
- Honor your losses
  - Major losses: People, health problems, retirement, re-location
  - Cumulative losses: age related physical changes
  - Do not minimize the impact of your small losses
- Express your feelings
- Share your grief with others

Your spiritual well-being: Finding peace
- How do you define a life well lived?
- What are your doubts?
- Lay down your burdens:
• Your guilt and regrets: events cannot be changed
  o Make amends or apologies, if possible
  o Write it on a piece of paper to be burned
  o Tell a friend who will not judge you
• Your grudges: anger poisons your soul
  o Forgive the person who wronged you
  o Know that it was not as personal as it felt. (The school yard bully)

Other burdens

• Your pride
  o Pride that keeps you from asking for help
  o Pride that keeps you in physical pain
  o Pride that keeps you from reaching out to people you miss
  o Pride that keeps you at home (not using walker, wheel chair)
  o Pride that keeps you isolated at home and in public
    (unwillingness to obtain and use hearing aids)
• Your expectations
  o Perfectionism and pride
  o Stop doing thing that no longer brings you joy
  o Do to yourself as you would do unto others
• Your stuff
  o Possessions can weigh you down
  o “The Life-changing Magic of Tidying up”
  o Gather the whole clan for a big “clearing out” event
  o Caring transitions

Stress Management techniques

Techniques
• Positive thinking and Gratitude
  o Daily ritual
• Doing for others - Volunteering
- Connecting with your community
  - Doing for others – Random acts of kindness
    - Smile and make eye contact
    - Compliment someone
    - Pay attention to people who are commonly ignored
  - Exercise – vigorous exercise, if you can tolerate it is as effective, for some, as antidepressant medication
  - Deep breathing
    - 15 minutes/day improves health
  - Meditation or bio-feedback changes your brain waves
    - Smart phone apps
  - Practice mindfulness
    - Living in the moment
    - Pay positive attention to your surroundings
    - Bring back your mind when it wanders
  - Nature
    - People who live close to nature or spend time in nature are healthier
    - Get the full experience, sights, sounds, smells. Leave your ear buds at home
    - Nature images and sounds are also effective
  - Gardening – Microbes in the soil
  - Dog therapy
  - Laugh! Have fun! Find joy

**Interrupt your stress response (reset your brain)**
- Deep breathing
- Singing out loud
- Shaking your body 2-3 minutes
- Gargling for at least one minute
- Yoga balancing poses (not proven)
Boost your Serotonin levels
- Inner Canthus massage

Getting started
- Take stock of where you are
- Suspend judgment of where you are
- Think in terms of substitution
- Developing new habits take time
- Make only a few, small changes at a time
- Be realistic about what you are unwilling to give up

Books you might enjoy
Enders, Guilia: Gut: The Inside Story of our Body’s Most Underrated Organ”
Kaae, Kirsten: “It Is about Time: Straight Talk about Aging and End of Life”
Kondo, Marie: “the Life changing Magic of Tidying up”
McWilliams and Roger. You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought
Shaw, Eva: “What to Do When a Loved One Dies: A Practical and Compassionate Guide to Dealing with Death on Life’s Terms”
Viorst Judith: “Necessary Losses”
Weil, Andrew: “8 Weeks to Optimum Health”