Stress Management

Stress is a natural physiological response to a demand
Stress is associated with a perceived threat or danger.
Stress can arise physical, mental, and emotional issues.

The “Fight or Flight” response
- Stress starts with a triggering events
- Sets the “fight or flight” response in motion
- Chemical chain reaction releases
- Adrenalin and Cortisol access stored energy and changes blood flow
  - Increases blood supply to the brain, heart, lungs, and muscles
  - Reduces blood supply to the skin and to the intestinal tract.

Results of these changes:
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Muscle tension, stiffness, and pain,
- Digestive problems, stomach ulcers, poor nutrition, dry mouth, queasiness, and diarrhea
- Sleeplessness
- Lowered immune response
- Depression caused by depletion of Serotonin in the brain

Stress and Depression
- Depression is not a “mind over matter” issue
- Chronic pain, prolonged illness, and prolonged caregiving can lead to depression
- Depression in older adults increases risk of dementia
- Antidepressants work. If your depression is due to mental and emotional stressors, combining medication with therapy is recommended
Major sources of Stress

Grief affects our lives in many ways

- Major losses: People you love, serious health problems, retirement, re-location
- Cumulative losses: age related physical changes

What you can do

- Honor and acknowledge your losses
- Do not minimize the impact of your losses
- Express your feelings
- Share your grief with others
- support groups, chat rooms

Anxiety: The Monster in the Closet

Health and finances

- Make a list of the “what ifs”
- Get information from your medical professional or your financial advisor.
- List your available options
- Make your decisions. Have a plan A and a plan B.
- What it the best and the worst case scenarios.
- Plan for the worst. It is not morbid; it is prudent!
- Document your decisions
- Communicate your decisions to those who need it.

Documents you will need

- Living will (a.k.a. Directives to Physicians)
- Medical POA. Choose someone who agrees with your wishes
- Out of Hospital DNR
- General Power of Attorney
- Will (disposal of your worldly goods)
- Funeral plans
Other sources of stress

Physical limitations: One of these days I will need to….
- Adapt your home:
- Grab bars and handrails
- Remove obstacles
- Eliminate stairs if possible
- Get organized
- Explore delivery services and transportation options
- If you think you will need to move, make plans ahead of time

How to Ask for and receive help
- Know who you can call on
- Swallow your pride
- Do not wait until you are at the point of desperation!
- Give people choices when you call on them – make a list
- Get a regular time – a scheduled commitment
- Let go of non-essentials
- Let go of expectations – your own and those perceived from others

Stress and Nutrition
- Breakfast and balanced meals
- Digestive enzymes (often deficient in the older adult)
- Nutritional supplementation: Vit. B1, B6, B12, D, and Calcium
- Intestinal health – probiotics and Serotonin

Spiritual concerns
- Spirituality in the later years is about finding peace
- Do I have any regrets? Have I lived my life well? How will I be remembered?
- What are your fears? Do you have a belief about death and the afterlife that makes sense to you?
- Know who would be comfortable discussing these issues with you
**Stress Management**

**Techniques**
- Deep breathing
  - 15 minutes/day improves health
- Meditation or bio-feedback changes your brain waves
  - Smart phone apps
- Exercise
  - The very best one is the one you are willing to do
  - Vigorous exercise is good if you can tolerate it
  - Exercise is as effective for some as antidepressants
- Nature
  - People who live close to nature or spend time in nature are healthier
  - Get the full experience, sights, sounds, smells. Leave your earbuds at home
  - Nature images and sounds are also effective
- Practice mindfulness
  - Living in the moment
  - Pay positive attention to your surroundings
  - Bring back your mind when it wanders
- Positive thinking and Gratitude
- Doing for others - Volunteering
  - Connecting with your community
- Random acts of kindness
  - Smile and make eye contact
  - Compliment someone
  - Pay attention to people who are commonly ignored
- Gardening – Microbes in the soil
- Animal companions.
  - Boost the “feel good” hormones oxytocin and serotonin
  - Reduce adrenalin, cortisol, and testosterone
- 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)

**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

**Limit exposure to voluntary stressors**
- TV news
- Scary movies

**Books you might enjoy**
Kondo, Marie, “the Life changing Magic of Tidying up”
McWilliams and Roger. You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought
Ruiz, Don Miguel. “The Four Agreements”
Viorst Judith. “Necessary Losses”
Weil, Andrew. “8 Weeks to Optimum Health”
Kaae, Kirsten. “It Is about Time”

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