Stress Management

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

The “Fight or Flight” response
- Stress starts with a triggering event
- Sets the “flight or fight” response in motion
- Chemical chain reaction releases: Adrenalin and Cortisol in order to access stored energy
- Changes blood flow and nerve conduction
  o Increases blood supply to the brain, heart, lungs, and muscles
  o 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

Stress and Depression
- Depression is not a “mind over matter” issue
- Long-term stress, including chronic pain, prolonged illness, and prolonged caregiving can lead to depression
- Depression in older adults increases risk of dementia
- There are many ways to combat depression.
  o Exercise and volunteering
  o Therapy and antidepressants
Much of our low-level stress can be mitigated

- Dealing with loss
- Dealing with the unknowns
- Taking care of and protecting your body
- Getting organized

Some stressors are outside our control

Major sources of Stress

Grief affects our lives in many ways

- Major losses include people you love, serious health problems, retirement, and 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 are 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
• Last Will and Testament (disposal of your worldly goods)
• Funeral plans
• Information list

Other sources of stress

Physical limitations: One of these days I will need to….
• Adapt your home:
  • Grab bars and handrails
  • Remove obstacles, throw rugs
  • Eliminate stairs if possible
• Get organized
• Plan for when you need to stop driving
• 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

Helpless anxiety

War, hunger natural disasters
Do what you can:

- Support organizations
- Write letters,
- Volunteer
- Limit exposure

**Stress and Nutrition**

- Breakfast is still the most important meal
- Regular, balanced meals to maintain blood sugar levels
- Intestinal health influences your brain health
  - probiotics and serotonin
  - digestive enzymes
  - common deficiencies: vit B1, B6, B12, D, and Calcium

**Spiritual concerns**

- Spiritual concerns in the later years are mostly 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
  - Gets more oxygen to the brain
  - Reduces anxiety
  - Interrupts the stress response
  - 15 minutes/day improves general well-being and lowers blood pressure
- Meditation or bio-feedback changes your brain waves
  - Smart phone apps
• Exercise
  o The very best one is the one you are willing to do
  o Vigorous exercise is good if you can tolerate it
  o Exercise is as effective as antidepressants for some people

• Nature
  o People who live close to nature or spend time in nature are healthier and happier
  o Get the full experience, sights, sounds, smells. Leave your ear buds at home
  o Nature images and sounds are also effective

• Practice mindfulness
  o Living in the moment
  o Pay positive attention to your surroundings
  o Bring back your mind when it wanders

• Positive thinking and Gratitude

• Doing for others - Volunteering
  o Connecting with your community

• Random acts of kindness
  o Smile and make eye contact
  o Compliment someone
  o Pay attention to people who are commonly overlooked

• Gardening – Microbes in the soil

• Animal companions.
  o Boost the “feel good” hormones oxytocin and serotonin
  o Reduce adrenalin, cortisol, and testosterone

• Laugh! Have fun! Find joy

**Limit exposure to voluntary stressors**

• TV news
• Scary movies
• Negative people

**Interrupt your stress response (reset your brain)**
• Deep breathing
• Singing out loud
• Shaking your body 2-3 minutes
• Gargling for at least one minute
• Eye movement
• Yoga balancing poses (not proven)

**Getting started**

• Be realistic about what you are willing to give up
• Suspend judgment of where you are
• Make only a few, small changes at a time
• Link stress management to daily activities
• Think in terms of substitution, replace rather than eliminate
• Developing new habits take time

**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”

Presented by Kirsten Kaae RN, LPC