Managing Stress Levels Through Nutrition and Self-Care

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Stress causes around one million workers to miss work every day. According to the CDC, the prevalence of anxiety disorder is 3x more during COVID in 2020 as compared to the same survey given in 2019! During the winter months as we are forced to stay indoors more, our battle against stress will continue.

What is stress? Stress is defined as the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. Any pressure or strain put on an individual is labeled as stress. Stress can be physical, emotional, or psychological. Implementing habits to reduce or manage stress levels is the best plan of attack.

When we feel anxious or stressed, our body's nervous system releases stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. When these hormones are released, the fight or flight response is triggered and prepares our body for action. Chronic stress may result in a buildup or overuse of these stress hormones which may contribute to the breakdown of many bodily functions. Chronic stress has been linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 Diabetes, and depression. Understanding how our body is affected by stress can assist in finding ways to manage stress levels as they rise.

Since we have established that stress is inevitable, especially in the midst of a pandemic, becoming familiar with ways to manage stress is vital. First, take some time to plan out your week allowing for meal prep, exercise, rest, and some me-time.

Nutrition

In general, eating a well-balanced diet is important in managing stress. Be sure to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables daily as well as whole grains, low-fat or fat-free milk and oils, and lean proteins. Also, limit saturated fats, trans fats, added sugars, and sodium.

When we experience chronic stress, our immune system is overworked. This can lead to inflammation and cell damage. Functional foods are foods that have potential positive effects on health beyond basic nutrition, such as decreasing inflammation. Foods with anti-inflammatory properties include many fruits and vegetables such as berries and green leafy vegetables. Whole grains and green tea are also helpful. Lastly, be sure to get enough foods that are high in Omega-3 fatty acids such as salmon, walnuts, and soy.

During times of stress, we often reach for our favorite comfort foods. Use caution here as most comfort foods are high in saturated fats, sodium, and added sugars. With that, red meats and heavily processed foods can actually be pro-inflammatory. Eating out less and cooking at home more can help with limiting pro-inflammatory foods.

Be cautious when trying out fad diets you hear about in the media, such as intermittent fasting. While this can be an effective way to maintain or lose weight for some, periods of fasting are certainly not healthy for all adults. The key to stress management and maintaining a healthy weight is making lifestyle changes so that any efforts you make are sustainable.

Exercise

Along with eating a well-balanced diet, regular exercise helps with stress management as well. The mental health benefits of exercise come from the release of mood regulating hormones; dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins. The CDC recommends that an adult partakes in at least 150-minutes of moderately-intense activity and 2 days of muscle-strengthening activity per week. This translates into 30 minutes of exercise 5 days per week.

Rest

Another tip for managing stress is getting an adequate amount of sleep. The CDC recommends that adults get 7 or more hours of sleep each night. If you have trouble falling asleep, try going to bed at the same time each night and removing electronic devices about 30-60 mins before shutting your eyes. Take multiple deep breaths when feeling stressed to help control your heart rate and how you are feeling.

We all understand and know stress is a reality. Focusing on nutrition, physical activity, and rest are the best ways to manage stress. Learning how to respond to our stress in positive ways is what will help out in the long run. And remember, big changes are not going to happen overnight. It is easier to tackle new objectives with baby steps, so give yourself time!

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT QUIZ
WINTER ISSUE 2020

Eligible for 1 CEU in Key Area 1, NUTRITION

NAME: _____

MEMBER ID#: _____

EMAIL: _____

1) Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are examples of anti-inflammatory foods. **TRUE OR FALSE**

2) On average, how many hours of sleep should the average adult get per night?
   a. 3 hours
   b. 6 hours
   c. 7 hours

3) The best way to prepare for sleep is to focus your attention on social media platforms on your phone. **TRUE OR FALSE**

4) Cortisol is a hormone released in a calm state. **TRUE OR FALSE**

5) The CDC recommends that an adult partake in 30 minutes of exercise 5 days per week. **TRUE OR FALSE**

6) Intermittent fasting is considered a fad diet. **TRUE OR FALSE**

7) Chronic stress is NOT linked to chronic diseases. **TRUE OR FALSE**

8) The mental health benefits of exercise come from inhaling and exhaling. **TRUE OR FALSE**

9) Stress can be physical, emotional, or psychological. **TRUE OR FALSE**

10) Facebook is a great stress management app available for monitoring caloric intake. **TRUE OR FALSE**

Submit to Sheri Shipp, Executive Director by email or postal mail.
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