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MINDFULNESS MATTERS TIP SHEET

8 Tips for Less Stress and Better Health

We've all have felt stress in our lives. While stress has many faces, it often presents like a strain, a tension, distress or a daunting challenge or demand. Sometimes stress is a positive force, motivating us to perform. But often, it can be a negative force. If you experience stress over a prolonged period of time, it could become chronic, which can adversely impact your health and well-being. (Adapted from How Stress Affects Your Health—apa.org.)

Here are 8 tips to positively impact your stress level and your health. These tips are offered simply to get you thinking about what specific activities could potentially aid you in being less stressed and more content every day. You likely can name a number of other activities that you might both enjoy and find peace in doing. The key is to turn those activities into routine practices, so they have the power to raise your sense of joy in the moment and keep you balanced when the going gets rough.

1. Practice Relaxation

Relaxation can help decrease stress levels, which in turn can promote good health. Examples of activities that can help with relaxation:

- Deep breathing
- Engaging in hobbies or activities you find fun and relaxing
- Muscle relaxation activities
- Daily quiet/rest time with your eyes closed
- Meditation or silent prayer
- Guided imagery contemplation
- Anything healthy that relaxes you

2. Get Active

Exercising your body can be a way to both decrease stress and promote good health

- Move your body—It doesn't have to be strenuous.
- Movement can be easy or challenging—the bar of what's easy or hard is different for everyone
- There are so many ways to be active—you can do it alone, with your pets or while connecting with others.
- Walking is a great basic option (or some kind of paced bodily movement if you can't walk).
- Try combining exercise with adventure (e.g., a hiking or biking trip to explore a new place).

3. Limit Use of Alcohol/Drugs

Alcohol and drugs can be used to help you relax in the short term, but there is the possibility of overuse, misuse and negative consequences. There is the reality that alcohol and drug use is illegal in some contexts, that they impact people differently and that people with addiction issues face more potential negative impacts when they use alcohol and drugs.

- Be careful in navigating alcohol/drug use to decrease stress. Be aware of how your alcohol and drug use can help you and how it can hurt you and others.
- Limit your use of alcohol/drugs.
- Recognize the possibility of developing problems with dependence on alcohol or drugs.

4. Identify Social Supports

Social supports are people you can turn to in times of need or crisis to give you a broader focus and positive self-image. Social supports can enhance the quality of life and provides a buffer against adverse life events. (The Importance of Social Support | The Project (phctheproject.org))

- Develop a social network of people you trust—family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, peers, etc.
- Talk to/interact with people in that network to enjoy life more, air your concerns and get support.

5. Eat Mindfully

Eating mindfully is all about cultivating a healthy relationship with food and your body, as opposed to allowing our appearance-based culture to rigidly and judgmentally dictate how we think about them (adapted from Tribole & Resch, Intuitive Eating). A few tips (The Center for Mindful Eating - Home):

- Allow yourself to become aware of the positive, nurturing opportunities that are available through food selection and preparation, by respecting your own inner wisdom/choices.
- Use all your senses to choose to eat food that is satisfying to you and nourishing to your body.
- Acknowledge your inner reactions to foods (likes, dislikes or neutral) without judgment.
- Become aware of hunger and satiety cues to guide your decisions to begin and end eating.

6. Nurture a Sense of Humor

(from Humor in Psychology: Coping and Laughing Your Woes Away (positivepsychology.com))

The belief that laughter heals the mind has been around for centuries. And why not? Humor just feels good; it distracts us from our problems and promotes a lighter perspective. If you would like to laugh more and lighten up, consider the below activities:

- Watch or listen to stand-up comedy.
- Spend more time around funny people.
- Don't allow others to dictate what you find amusing.
- Read funny books.
- Play with a pet.
- Don't be afraid to embrace your inner child.

7. Plan for Restful Sleep

- Unplug and disconnect from all electronics about an hour before bedtime.
- Dim the lights, if possible, around the same time.
- Avoid spicy foods, alcohol and nicotine close to bedtime.
- Establish a consistent bedtime/wake time.
- Use bed for sleep and sex only.
- If you are unable to sleep after 30 minutes, get out of bed and do some type of quiet activity, such as reading, until you feel sleepy. Then try again. Repeat as often as it takes.
- Keep a notepad by the bed—and write down thoughts you may have when you wake up.
- Do not stare at clock—try not to even look at it if possible.

8. Use Positive Self-Talk

Make positive statements to yourself. Research in this area is showing that conscious and unconscious messages we give ourselves are very important (see What is Positive Self-Talk? (Incl. Examples) (positivepsychology.com)), so:

- Remind yourself every day how capable you are and how good you are at what you do
- Compliment yourself and send supportive messages to yourself
- Be your own best friend, not your worst enemy!

Note: Tip sheet Adapted from the handout, 7 Steps to Better Health. Thank you to Michele Kramer, LCSW, for sharing it with us.

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If you are looking for mental health counseling and support, please reach out to us!