Stress Management: Techniques for Cancer Survivors

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What I’ll talk about

- What is stress?
- Stress management and coping
- Tips for the holidays
What is stress?
What is stress?

The physical, mental, or emotional tension experienced in reaction to an event.
What is stress?

- Typically experienced when we perceive demands exceeding our resources.
What is stress?

- Typically experienced when we perceive demands exceeding our resources
The Fight or Flight Response

- Hormones released and help us run and fight
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
  - Delivers more oxygen and blood sugar to important muscles
- Increased sweating to cool these muscles
- Blood diverted away from the skin to the core of our bodies
  - Reduces blood loss if we are injured
- Attention is focused on the threat
- Significantly improves our ability to survive life-threatening events
Stress is a matter of judgment

- Must make two main judgments:
  - Must feel threatened by the situation
  - Must doubt that their capabilities and resources are sufficient to meet the threat

- Just as with real threats to our survival, perceived threats trigger the full fight-or-flight response
  - Excitable, anxious, jumpy and irritable
  - Reduced ability to work effectively with other people
  - Accident-prone and less able to make good decisions

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
Is all stress bad?
Don’t tell me to relax
Stress is the glue that holds me together
Effects of chronic stress

- Increased vulnerability to common cold
- Slower wound healing
- General decrements in immune function
- High blood pressure and high cholesterol
- Heart disease
- Weight gain (central fat storage)
- Poor control of blood sugar among diabetics
- Poor health behaviors (e.g., diet, smoking, no exercise)
- Shortened telomeres and telomerase activity
- DNA damage and poor repair

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
Managing Stress
ANTI-STRESS KIT

BANG
HEAD
HERE

Instructions
1. Place on firm surface.
2. Follow directions provided in circle.
3. Repeat until you are anti-stressed or become unconscious.
How can we manage stress?

- Decrease perceived demands
- Increase perceived resources

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
The five R’s of managing stress

1. Recognize the signs of stress
2. Reappraise the situation
3. Respond
4. Relax
5. Rejuvenate
1. Recognize the symptoms of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hostility</th>
<th>Anger</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Irritable Bowel</td>
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<td>Headaches</td>
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<td>Backaches</td>
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<td>Muscle Spasms</td>
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<td>Irritability</td>
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<td>Fears</td>
<td>Physical Weakness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neck Aches</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
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*Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center*
Effects of stress

Stressful situation

cognitive

emotional

behavioral

physical

social

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
2. Reappraise the situation

- Notice your self-talk
  - Overly negative:
    - “My back hurts. The cancer has spread! There will be nothing my doctors can do this time.”
  - Overly positive:
    - “My back hurts. If I ignore it, it will go away.”
  - Balanced:
    - “My back hurts. I may have pulled a muscle. I should make an appointment and have my doctor check it out.”

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
Other types of negative thoughts

- All or nothing thinking (black and white thinking)
- Overgeneralization
- Disqualifying the positive
- Jumping to conclusions (fortune telling)
- Magnification or minimization
- “Should” statements
Be aware of your negative thoughts, so you can change them

- Challenge the overly negative thoughts
  - How accurate is this belief?
  - What would you say to a friend going through this same situation?
  - What is the evidence for or against this thought?
  - What is the worst thing that could happen? What is the best?
  - What are some things you can think about or say to yourself to make yourself calmer?

- Aim for balanced, rational thinking

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
3. Respond to the situation

- Coping and control

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<th>Example:</th>
<th>Controllable</th>
<th>Uncontrollable</th>
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Example: A winter storm warning has been issued.

How much snow will there be?

- Stocking up on supplies
- Preparing your car and your home
- Changing work or travel plans

When the storm will arrive?
Coping techniques

- Problem-focused
  - Information seeking
  - Goal setting
  - Conflict resolution
  - Asking for help

- Emotion-focused
  - Reappraisal of the situation
  - Reframing thoughts
  - Exercise
  - Relaxation exercises
  - Talk with friends

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
4. Relax

- Once you recognize how you show stress, catch it early and learn to relax.
  - Diaphragmatic Breathing/CALM exercise
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Imagery
  - Meditation
5. Rejuvenate!

- Exercise
- Yoga
- Fresh air
- Social support
- Hobbies
- Get enough rest
- Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water
Stress and the holidays
Recognize holiday triggers

- **Relationships**
  - Tensions are often heightened during the holidays
  - Family misunderstandings and conflicts can intensify
  - Facing the holidays without a loved one

- **Finances**
  - Increased spending for gifts, travel, food and entertainment

- **Physical demands**
  - Extra shopping and socializing
  - Exercise and sleep may take a back seat to chores and errands
  - Exhaustion increases your stress
  - More susceptible to colds and other illnesses

Adapted from the Mayo Clinic
Tips for a stress-free holiday

- Acknowledge your feelings
- Reach out
- Be realistic
- Set aside differences
- Stick to a budget
- Plan ahead
- Learn to say no
- Don't abandon healthy habits
- Take a breather
- Seek professional help if you need it
New evidence that dark chocolate helps ease emotional stress
Questions?
**Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercise**

1. Sit in a comfortable position.

2. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach, in order to monitor your diaphragmatic breathing (only your stomach should move.).

3. Inhale deeply and slowly (approximately 4 seconds) through your nose.

4. Exhale deeply and slowly (again approximately 4 seconds) through your mouth, allowing the air to fully escape.

5. Continue this deep breathing for 30 to 60 seconds.

6. Practice this **at least once a day**, but especially at times when you feel yourself becoming stressed.

** It is normal for this healthy breathing to feel a little awkward at first. With practice, it will become more natural for you.

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**The CALM Reminder**

- **C**hest: Breathe slower and deeper
- **A**rms: Shoulders and arms sag
- **L**egs: Loose and flexible
- **M**outh: Jaw drops
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Both diaphragmatic breathing and the CALM exercise are excellent for breaking up stress when it starts to occur. Sometimes, however, they do not produce the deep level of relaxation that is desired. Other times, they are insufficient for breaking up stress (e.g., when it is very intense). For such occasions, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) can be quite helpful. It requires more time and a quiet environment, but the results can be very worthwhile!

PMR involves tensing a specific muscle group to about 1/3-2/3 maximum tension for 4-5 seconds, followed by a complete release of tension for 45-60 seconds. The muscle group is then tensed again, followed by release again. After completing both cycles, the next muscle group is indulged. The muscles involved, and the manner of tensing them, are presented below:

1. **Both legs**: Lift both legs off the ground, straighten your knees and point your toes toward your head.
2. **Chest**: Take a very deep breath (through the upper chest, not the diaphragm) and hold it.
3. **Both arms**: Turn your palms up, then make a fist. Bring your fists up to your shoulders while tensing the biceps.
4. **Abdomen**: Tighten these muscles as if you were about to be hit in the stomach.
5. **Shoulders**: Lift both shoulders up toward your ears.
6. **Back of Neck**: Tuck in and lower your chin toward your chest.
7. **Forehead**: Raise your eyebrows.
8. **Eyes**: Squint.