Stress Management: Techniques for Caregivers

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What we’ll talk about

• The latest research on caregivers and stress
• What is stress?
• Stress management and coping
Caregiving and Cancer

- Physical, social, or emotional problems

“Lie waiting for the next earthquake and never sleep”

- Social problems and need for information

“Some information was not there unless we knew what questions to ask”
Caregiving and Cancer

• Responsibilities and effect on daily life

“From spouse to nurse”

“Problem to balance caring while keeping life as normal as possible for the children”
Caregiving and Cancer

- Fatigue
- Depressive symptoms
- Poor quality of life
  - Role changes, financial strain
- Negative health effects
  - Decrease immune function
- Balancing needs of patient with other family members
Caregiving and Cancer

- **Time**
  - 8.3 hours/day for ~14 months

- **Costs, cancer site**
  - Lung, $72,702
  - Ovarian, $66,210
  - Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, $59,613
  - Breast, $38,334

(Yabroff & Kim, 2009, Cancer)
Caregiving and Gender

- Female caregivers report more stress than males
- Women assume they must do the caregiving alone
- Men more likely to receive help than women
- Male caregivers report less stress about caregiving (↑ caregiver esteem)
  - Differences between physical vs. emotional support
  - The amount of physical support needed
Caregiving and Quality of Life

- 5 years of follow-up of caregivers
- ~16% still doing caregiving
- Older caregivers: better psychological function but poorer physical function
- Spousal caregivers especially vulnerable to poor QoL

(Kim, Spillers & Hall, 2010, Psycho-Oncology)
Help for Caregivers

- Interventions for caregivers
  - Educational to psychoeducational
  - How to best help loved one and themselves

- Support groups

- Internet
What is stress?
What is stress?

- Physical, mental, or emotional tension experienced in reaction to an event
- Typically experienced when we perceive demands exceeding our resources

Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
What is stress?

- Typically experienced when we perceive demands exceeding our resources

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

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>Symptom</th>
<th>Symptom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>Anger</td>
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<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Irritable Bowel</td>
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<td>Headaches</td>
<td>Muscle Tension</td>
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<td>Ulcers</td>
<td>Constipation</td>
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<td>Muscle Spasms</td>
<td>Poor Concentration</td>
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<td>Sleeping Difficulties</td>
<td>Appetite Changes</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
<td>Low Self Esteem</td>
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<td>Drinking/Drug Use</td>
<td>Chronic Diarrhea</td>
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<td>Irritability</td>
<td>Insomnia</td>
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<td>Fears</td>
<td>Physical Weakness</td>
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<td>Neck Aches</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
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Adapted from Dr. Bonnie McGregor, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
2. Reappraise the situation

- Notice your self-talk
  - Overly negative:
    - “I have too much to do. I’m a bad spouse/parent/child because there’s no way I can meet all these needs.”
  - Overly positive:
    - “If I ignore my responsibilities, they’ll go away.”
  - Balanced:
    - “I have a lot to do today. I’ll prioritize my tasks, and get the most important things taken care of. I can ask for help if I need it.”
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
3. Respond to the situation

- Coping and control

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<tr>
<th>Example:</th>
<th>Controllable</th>
<th>Uncontrollable</th>
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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
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF EMOTIONAL STRESS

Hey, I feel better already.
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
Summary

- Caregiving can have negative psychological and physical effects
- Stress can never be completely avoided, but you can learn to better manage it
- Five R’s of stress management
  1. Recognize YOUR signs of stress
  2. Reappraise the situation
  3. Respond (controllable vs. not)
  4. Relax
  5. Rejuvenate!
Questions?