Practical Ways to Manage Stress
How to Thrive, Not Just Survive

Sept. 28, 2020
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Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather, traditionally known as asiniskaw sipisis (Stoney Creek), is Treaty 6 territory and a traditional meeting ground for many Indigenous peoples. The land on which the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta is located provided a travelling route and home to the Maskwacis Nêhiyawak, Niitsitapi, Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations, the Métis, and other Indigenous peoples. Their spiritual and practical relationships to the land create a rich heritage for our learning and our life as a community.
What Are We Talking About Today?

● Stress - What is it?

● Neuroscience - Brain/Nervous System, Stress & Relaxation Responses

● PRACTICAL ways to support Nervous System well being
  ○ Sleep
  ○ Nutrition
  ○ Movement
  ○ Breath
  ○ Refocus Attention (Present vs Past/Future)
  ○ Social Connection
What is Stress?

“What is the way life talks to us. It tells us something is out of balance.”
- Kris Miller MA, LMT, CHP

FACT or MYTH: Stress is bad.

STRESS:
- Allows physical development
- Shows where growth is needed
- In case we need to mobilize a lot of energy (emergency)
- Prepares for injury
- Learning
The Brain & Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity - ability to form new neural connections

Amygdala - alarm!
Hippocampus - calm down

Prefrontal cortex - reason, decision making, long term planning
**Branches of the Nervous System**

**Parasympathetic (PNS)**
- **Relaxation Response**
- **Rest & Digest**
  - Growth
  - Fires when engaged socially, when we are in the moment, when we are digesting and resting.
  - Respond (response-able)

**Sympathetic (SNS)**
- **Stress Response**
- **Fight, Flight, Freeze**
  - Protection (survival)
  - Responds to perceived threats to our safety (tiger, paper tiger, tiger on tv, tiger in the mind).
  - React
The Stress Response

Informs us about something

STRESSOR

ALARM Reaction
- in milliseconds
- lasts ~30 sec
- heart beats faster & harder
- breath quickens
- brain on alert
- liver dumps glucose into blood
- blood to muscles/brain (away from digestive/urinary/reproductive systems)
- skeletal muscle tone increases
- pupils dilate
- @ 20 sec
- lasts up to 2 hr
- adrenalin released
- increases focus
- keeps alarm reaction going

INTERMEDIATE Reaction
- @ 20 sec
- lasts up to 2 hr
- increases focus
- keeps alarm reaction going

RESISTANCE Reaction
- @ 2 hr
- can last days, weeks, months
- cortisol, aldosterone
- ↓ immune response
- ↓ wound healing
- ↓ neurotransmitters
- ↓ memory/learning
- ↑ blood glucose
- ↑ bp (retain water, vasoconstriction)

... continued

10 - 14 days
- long term ability to mobilize energy
- thyroid releases T3, T4
- ↑ basal metabolic rate

... continued
When under threat, prefrontal cortex less available, making us more impulsive (hand model of brain).

- Suddenly, an exam is the same as a car barreling towards me
- When our nervous system fires too high (emergency) too often, it gets used to firing too high too often.

Signs and symptoms are the body’s language.

Humans are very adaptable. We can practice relaxation to make it more available.
The Relaxation Response

In Rest & Digest

- Energy Conserved
- Digestion (blood flow to internal organs, digestive enzymes secreted)
- Heart beats slower and with less force
- Skeletal muscle tone relaxes
- Body can repair itself

**Thriving:** The window of tolerance is the space in which both the stress AND relaxation responses flow.

- We are designed to be in Rest & Digest most of time
- Visit Fight & Flight
  * Then return back to Rest & Digest *
Sleep

Being well rested increases capacity to navigate stressful situations.

7-9 hours/night (everyone is unique)

Nudge body/mind to remember how to sleep

- Sleep Environment
- Bedtime routine ie. wind down
  - Decrease stimuli to transition to relaxation
  - Practices to engage PNS
Why Healthy Nutrition?

A well-nourished body will give you the resources to help manage stress.

**Brain-Gut Connection**

Enteric Nervous System: High concentration of nerves in intestines send messages to brain (gut feeling, feel like punched in the gut, listen to your gut)

Microbiome: Bacteria in intestines break down food into absorbable nutrients

Also produce neurotransmitters like serotonin that affect mood

What we eat affects both of these processes.
What is Healthy Eating?

1. WHAT you eat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>more of</th>
<th>less of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rainbow of veggies &amp; fruits,</td>
<td>caffeine &amp; sugar - stimulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whole grains (fiber feeds microbiome)</td>
<td>SNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water - brain &amp; body need</td>
<td>fried foods - sluggishness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. HOW you eat

- Be mindful of your eating habits
  - notice when hungry and when full
  - minimize distractions, take time to eat
  - rest & digest vs fight & flight
- Cook more often/Plan what you eat
- Enjoy your food
- Eat meals with others

https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/
Movement

How we feel affects how we hold our body
How hold body affects how we feel
Held patterns ➔ tension

Movement

• increases circulation (brings oxygen and nutrients to brain)
• improves function of all body systems (immune, digestive, respiratory…)
• releases tension
• helps the body/mind to quiet
Breathing & the Nervous System

Autonomic Nervous System controls respiration so we don’t have to think about it AND we can control consciously for specific effects.

Communication System:
- check in with how I’m doing
- send message to brain that it’s ok to relax

Breathe for Relaxation (stimulate PNS)
- Belly/Diaphragmatic Breath
- Lengthen Exhales (double length of inhale)
Refocusing Our Attention

PAUSE - interrupt pattern

Once we become aware of where our attention is going, we can move it.
- 90 second life of thought

NOTICING is the practice

REFOCUS - present moment
- surroundings (I spy…)
- physical sensations
- breath

Mindfulness

Equanimity: non-judgemental awareness
Social Connections

Tend & Befriend: activates relaxation response
Humans are social beings
Face to face interactions
Friendships benefit physical health

Seek Joy & Fulfillment

- laugh, play
- practice gratitude, curiosity
- what gives meaning to your life
Awareness ➔ Choice

What we practice gets easier and stronger
• Habits that promote stress response
• Habits that promote relaxation response

HABITS - Daily Practices

Small, consistent changes
Some possible examples:
• replace afternoon chocolate bar with fruit and handful of nuts
• make bed first thing in the morning
• roll shoulders down and back at start of every class
• go for a 10 min walk after last class of the day
• practice deep breathing for 3 min before bed
Questions
Write down one comment or question about this workshop.