

Think Tank July 2015

Focus: Freedom from Chronic Stress



We live in a fast-paced world with so many things on our plates, as they say, that some amount of stress is unavoidable. Because stress is an endorphin producing experience in the body, it can actually give you the energy you need to move forward in accomplishing your goals. Chronic stress, on the other hand is an entirely different story. It can have harmful effects, such as raising blood pressure and cortisol levels and causing debilitating headaches, auto-immune disease, skin conditions, digestive issues and interfere with both quality and length of life. Here are some tips for keeping stress levels in check:

Set limits and learn to say no. Sit down and make a list of the things you are currently obligated to do, what you need to do, and what you want to do. You may need to prioritize and decide what items on your list are really important to you and what are not. Now, when others ask you for additional commitments, if you truly don't have the time, say no to more commitments until you feel your commitments and thus your stress are under control. Sometimes it's hard to say no to others, but remember your health is your primary concern and increasing stress by over-committing can be unhealthy.

Schedule some down time for yourself. Even if the only "free" time you have during the day is ten minutes for lunch, you can still find a quiet place to rest your eyes, do a few yoga stretches, go for a short walk, put your ear buds in and listen to some Zen music, have a cup of herbal tea while looking at a magazine, take a relaxing bubble bath or hot shower. Find a calming routine that works for you. Down time does wonders for your stress.

Use your support system and ask for help when you need it. Reach out to friends or relatives and let them know when you are having a tough time and need their support and guidance.



Breathe. Seriously. Even notice how when feeling stressed, your shoulders become hunched, your body tenses up and your breath becomes shallow? Our bodies move into a fight or flight stance which only increases stress and the sensations of anxiety. Maybe set an hourly reminder on your phone to take five or seven deep breaths. Count to seven on the breath, hold the breath for seven counts, and exhale while counting to seven. You will be amazed how relaxed you feel afterward.

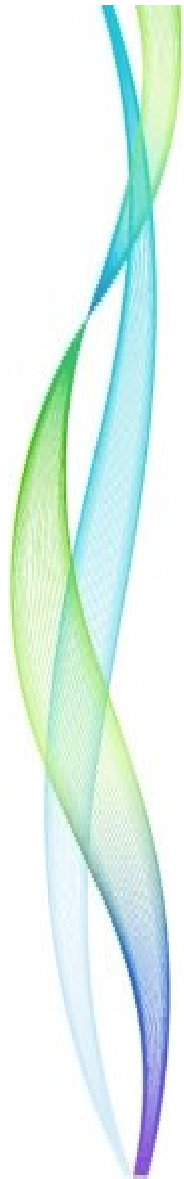
Incorporate movement. Experts say that prolonged "sitting is the new smoking", meaning that a sedentary lifestyle is actually very detrimental to good health. Regular movement is an excellent way to reduce stress levels. A brisk walk or other aerobic activity can increase your energy and concentration levels and lessen stress and feelings of anxiety. Physical activity increases your endorphins and decreases the production of stress hormones.

Sleep. Strive for a minimum of 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Our bodies need this time to recover and repair from the stress of the day. Go to bed at a regular time each night, eliminate distractions, such as televisions, computers or cell phones. Begin winding down an hour or two before you go to sleep. Try reading, listening to calming music and meditating. If you tend to lie in bed and worry, write down your concerns well in advance of bedtime and then work on quieting your thoughts before lights-out.

Be aware of your thoughts and the messages you give yourself. Strive for a positive outlook. Try seeing situations as opportunities rather than problems. Some people contribute to their stress by their need to handle things "perfectly." Setting more realistic expectations can help. Also, circumstances have a way or working out; it is important to keep challenges in perspective and do what you can reasonably do to move forward. To help get that needed perspective, ask yourself, "How important is this situation?" or "Will I even remember this 10 years, 5 years, 2 years or next year?"

When you're feeling overwhelmed, it's easy to resort to distorted thinking that creates or exacerbates stress levels. For example, yelling "Look at all these bad drivers!" (honk, honk, honk) when you're behind the wheel serves no purpose other than getting you more upset. Instead, try something like, "I left for the office with plenty of time today. I'm really not in a hurry." Or, if you tend to imagine things worse than they probably are "My boss is going to fire me!", practice replacing those thoughts with something more





realistic "If my boss doesn't like my report, I'll ask for suggestions on how to improve it."

Seek additional help. If you continue to feel overwhelmed, are feeling hopeless or are having trouble getting through your daily routine, seek consultation with a licensed mental health professional such as a licensed professional counselor or a licensed marriage and family therapist. They are trained to help you develop strategies to manage stress effectively.

Make a commitment to include these simple tips in your daily life, and learn to enjoy freedom from chronic stress. Make behavioral and thinking changes to help improve your overall health.

Self Care Strategies: Yoga

At Insights, we say that, "Therapy is like yoga for the mind." We believe that healthy living requires an holistic approach -mind, body and spirit. When viewed in this regard, it's also true that *yoga* is like therapy for the *body*. In fact, it just might be the "perfect" exercise for nearly everyone: beginner yogis enjoy Hatha Yoga; athletes may prefer more challenging, flow-type yoga or one that focuses on muscle stretching; and elderly people, or those with health challenges, benefit greatly from restorative yoga. If you've never tried yoga before, why not try it with us as Insights? Beginning July 25th, every 4th Saturday of the month, we will host a Yin Yoga class from 11:30am-1pm. This type of yoga calms, stretches, strengthens, and builds endurance, practiced entirely while sitting or lying on the mat, without the use of props. There is no fee for this class but donations will be accepted and all proceeds will go to The American Heart Association, in honor of Scott's mothers. No reservations are needed. Just bring your own yoga mat.

Reconnect: Finding Intimacy on Family Vacations

Family vacations are memory makers --filled with fun activities, relaxed mealtimes and hopefully, lots of laughter. But they don't typically offer much in the way of couple's romance, especially if you're sharing a room with your kids. But that doesn't have to mean the only thing you can enjoy with your partner in a Disney-themed hotel room are furtive glances. Large hotels often offer affordable babysitting for younger children and summer camps for older ones. If you're visiting relatives or friends, ask them to take the kids out for dinner and the two of you can order room service or stay in. It



won't be exactly the same as your honeymoon, but it can still be a lot of fun.

Bibliotherapy: *The Dinner* by Herman Koch

This is the story of two families connected by brothers; one, running for prime minister of The Netherlands and the other, seemingly jealous of that fact. On a summer's evening in a trendy Amsterdam restaurant, they and their wives meet for dinner to reluctantly discuss their fifteen-year old sons, involved together in a horrific crime. In fact, the entire book takes place over the course of that one meal. But if you're thinking, *What's so interesting about a dinner?*, then hold onto your Dutch bonnets because *stuff happens*; stuff that forces the parents to answer the questions: When it comes to protecting our children, how far is *too far*? This international best seller (touted as "a European *Gone Girl*" by the *Wall Street Journal*) is definitely a worthy read.

Time-Out: Raising Open-Minded Children

The Times They Are a-Changin. With wide social media coverage of controversial topics such as religion, trans-gender acceptance and gay marriage, many adults are challenged to face their own opinions in these matters, as well as try to figure out a way to guide their children to an age-appropriate understanding. But you may be surprised to learn that your kids' opinions don't necessarily gel with your own. Is that a "good" or a "bad" thing? What should you do? First, try to remember that what you, as a parent, believe is right, or moral, may not coincide with what is now legally or socially acceptable. Second, just listen to your children -really listen. Encourage them to share their thoughts and beliefs with you, even if you strongly disagree (and it's okay to share that, too, as long as you do so in a calm, respectful manner). For more insight on how these suggestions can relate specifically to your family, please contact [Laura Elpers](#) to schedule a parent coaching session.

Take Two: *I'll See You in My Dreams*

This film, starring Blythe Danner, features a widow of twenty years who has resigned herself to a rather predicable and somewhat lonely life. A series of events move her toward unlikely relationships with two men (one platonic, the other romantic), causing her to reconsider what daily life could or should be. Although the characters launch into some formulaic age-related silliness (sort of *It's Complicated* meets *Something's Gotta Give*),



the movie has a softer, more poignant side as well. Danner gives a wonderful, understated and moving performance. Bring tissues.

Insights Happenings:

Mindful Moms Group Join us weekly for an ongoing group designed for moms who are looking for help and understanding in navigating life challenges with their kids. This group is designed for moms with kids who are tween, teens, young adults, and boomerangs. Mindful Moms Group offers moms support, therapy, and education as well as connections, parenting tools and stress reduction techniques. The cost is \$30 a week, registration is not required. For more information email thinktank@insightstherapy.com or call (214) 706-0508.

Yoga We believe that healthy living requires an holistic approach - mind, body and spirit. We don't just treat symptoms or isolated causes. We work with you as a whole person to experience greater fulfillment and less anxiety in your life. Beginning July 25th, every 4th Saturday of the month, Insights will host a Yin Yoga class. Yoga for your mind -it calms, it stretches, it builds endurance. The poses in yin yoga are practiced entirely while sitting or lying on the mat, with out the use of props. This style of practice is a restorative yoga. The fee for this class is a donation and all proceeds will go to The American Heart Association. Instructor -Scott Murphy

New Men's Group Forming -Insights is considering starting a weekly therapeutic group for men. This group would start sometime in August or September and would meet weekly on Thursdays for 75 minutes. Members would need to commit to regular attendance for a month at a time. The group would focus on the difficulties, complexities and challenges men face daily at home, at work and in relationships. Topics would be initiated by the group on its own rather than having the counselor set the agenda or curriculum. Anticipated group topics include anger, shame, relational issues, vulnerability, values-based living, addictive behavior (not necessarily chemical) as well as other issues seen commonly in men's lives. This men's group would be a secure place where men could openly discuss and receive feedback and validation while also giving members a place to work through emotions and difficulties experienced in interactions with various personality types. This group would be led by Murphy Foster, LPC and would carry a cost of \$40 per session. If you have interest in being a part of this group, contact thinktank@insightstherapy.com

Nourish -Insights will be starting a new mixed-gender on going



group on Monday, May 11th for individuals 18 and up that struggle with eating and body image. The group will help separate food and feelings with the support of a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Registered Dietitian. The group will meet on Mondays from 6-7:30pm. For more information, call (214) 706-0508 or email thinktank@insightstherapy.com

Inner Evolution Group Coaching Inner Evolution Group Coaching is an ongoing women's group designed to enhance a women's fulfillment, harmony, and inner peace. Our mission is to empower women in their emotional and spiritual evolution through education, guidance, and support. The group will be facilitated by Amy Egan and Robin Knuuttila. To read more about this supportive and healing women's group please visit the Insights website. If you are looking for a deeper connection with yourself and other women call 214.356.7646 or email amy@innerevolutioncoaching.com to reserve your spot.

Our Time is Up: Stay tuned for our August issue...