

M A Y 2 0 1 6

Completely Well



Insurance Agency

Releasing the Pressure *Managing Stress in the Moment*

In the ideal world, it would be great to avoid or eliminate the events and people who stress us. But while we may be able to limit certain stressful situations, stress is just part of our lives. We need to know how to deal with stress, how to manage it in the moment, so that its negative effects are reduced. There are a couple of quick and easy techniques you can use to help manage stress!

- **Breathe** – Yes, you have heard it before. Deep belly breathing reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, improves concentration, and reduces anger and frustration. How to do it? When you find yourself in a stressful situation, take 30 seconds and focus on a deep breath. Breathe in so that your belly expands, like a balloon. Then breathe out through your nose, tightening your abdominal muscles to push out the air. While the greatest benefits of breathing exercises come with repeated deep breathing, even 1 deep breath will have a positive effect on the physical and mental symptoms of stress. The other good news? You can do this anywhere, and no one will notice you are actively reducing stress!
- **Silence** – Turn off the radio, the phone, and the television. Stop speaking for a moment. Silence reduces cortisol and adrenaline levels, which rise during stressful moments. Silence boosts your immune system and helps clarify thinking. Setting aside time for silence each day (in the car, the office, during a walk) has important benefits. But it can even help in the middle of an argument or stressful conversation. Take a moment and be silent. Gather your thoughts. You may find that everyone will benefit from your moment of silence.

Lifestyle



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Preventive

Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month

May is National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month, sponsored by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). With spring allergy season in full bloom and a summer to look forward to, it's important for patients with asthma and allergies to know triggers, symptoms, and treatments.

Allergies are an autoimmune response and can include nasal congestion, itching, hives, or a more serious reaction that includes trouble breathing and vomiting. Pollen, dust, mold, and insect stings are common allergies. Food allergies include nuts, dairy, and wheat. Allergy treatments include decongestants, antihistamines, and immunotherapy. Reducing exposure to allergy triggers is also important.

Asthma causes the airways to constrict, making it hard to breathe. Asthma can have many triggers, including upper respiratory viruses and allergies. Those with asthma must be monitored by a doctor and follow instructions for medications and possible triggers. Asthma can be life threatening and should be taken seriously. Treatments include both short-acting and long-acting bronchodilator inhalers, medication, and avoiding triggers. Managing allergies is an important step to managing asthma.

High Blood Pressure Education Month



Untreated high blood pressure is called a silent killer because it is virtually symptom free. Those with untreated high blood pressure are at greater risk for stroke, heart disease, kidney damage, blindness, and dementia. Blood pressure is the measurement of the pressure on the blood vessel walls as the heart beats. It is represented by 2 different numbers: systolic over diastolic (e.g. 120/80).

Diagnosing high blood pressure requires repeated readings. Illness, stress, and caffeine can all temporarily raise blood pressure. Certain factors increase the risk for high blood pressure: obesity, smoking, a diet high in saturated fat, a sedentary lifestyle, and family history. The risk for high blood pressure also increases as we age.

The American Heart Association recommends blood pressure screening at every regular healthcare appointment or at least once every 2 years, more often depending on age and risk factors. In addition, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding tobacco, and regular exercise can help reduce the risk for high blood pressure.

Will eating more fruit help to prevent a heart attack?

A recent study out of China reported that eating fresh fruit daily could reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke by nearly one-third. The response from the United States indicates that the study, reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, is promising but requires more research. We do know, however, that prior studies have shown that diets high in fruit are linked to a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. The bottom line is that diets high in fruits and vegetables have many health benefits!

Nutrition



Permission to Eat Well

Food is fuel. But food is also memories, celebration, distraction, and stress relief. We eat when we're hungry but for numerous other reasons as well. For some, choosing not to eat certain foods or at certain times is also about memories, stress and reasons other than hunger. Untangling all of the complexities surrounding what we eat and why we eat can be a complicated task. Too many times, it is about rules that focus on "no." Don't eat for emotional reasons. Don't eat certain foods. Don't eat after a certain time. A more positive approach, however, can be an easier way to improve your diet and eating habits. To do this, focus on "yes:"

- **Yes to variety.**

Eating a variety of foods helps to ensure a balanced diet. It's easy to get into a food rut, eating the same thing because it's more convenient. Say yes to a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains and lean protein choices each day. Adding variety to your diet can help keep you from getting bored, which can lead to overeating or mindless eating.

- **Yes to flavor.**

Making healthy food choices doesn't mean saying goodbye to flavor. Try fresh herbs, new spices and different cuisines. Don't settle for bland food. Even a ripe piece of fruit is bursting with flavor! Choose foods that are ripe and in season for the biggest flavor.

- **Yes to enough.**

Eating enough means getting in touch with your real hunger. Know what proper portions look like and begin with those (meat = size of a deck of cards, grains = size of a tennis ball, vegetable or fruit serving = size of a baseball). Give yourself time to know if you are full; it can take 20 minutes or so after eating to feel full. And if you are hungry, make sure you are eating enough.

- **Yes to eating consciously.**

Pay attention to what you are eating and why you are eating. Adding variety and flavor to your diet can help you to be more connected to what you're eating. Paying attention to portion sizes is another way to stop mindless eating. By focusing on what is good to eat, there is less room for what is not so good to eat. And take the time to enjoy what you are eating, rather than just eating on the run or eating in front of the television. Paying attention to what you are eating can help you eat better!

Try focusing on the positive about food and see what healthy changes you can make today!

Produce of the Month: Figs

If your only introduction to the fig is in the Fig Newton, you are missing out on a sweet treat that is available in dried form year round. The fig is originally from the Middle East and requires full sun and a warm climate to grow. It is highly perishable, which is why the dried version is most commonly used. The sweetness of figs, sometimes described as honey-like, works well with other strong flavors and can be used in both sweet and savory dishes.



The Basics: Fresh figs should be free from bruises and have a deep color. They should also not have any noticeable soft spots. These should be stored in the refrigerator and used within 2 days as they are highly perishable. Rinse and remove the stem before eating or cooking. Dried figs should be stored in an airtight container in a cool spot. Dried figs can be used in a variety of recipes or eaten as a snack. They can also be simmered to make them juicier.

Try This: Add figs to your favorite muffin or breakfast bread recipe. Combine figs, caramelized onions, and balsamic vinegar. Simmer until well combined and use as a topping for sliced baguette. Figs and lemon are a great combination and can be used as a great addition to grilled chicken.

The Facts: Figs are high in fiber and a good source of vitamin B6 and potassium.

Fitness

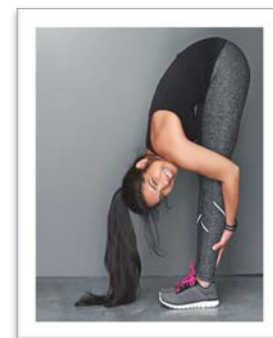
Flexibility and Fitness

Flexibility refers to your ability to move your joints through an entire range of motion. Why is flexibility important? The benefits are many:

- Improves posture
- Decreases risk of injury
- Reduces muscle soreness after exercise
- Improves the ability to do daily tasks

Though flexibility can decrease as we age, you can improve flexibility through regular stretching. Stretch a warm muscle gently, and hold for 20-60 seconds. Stretching a cold muscle can lead to an injury. Breathe during your stretch and do not bounce. Be sure to stretch all major muscles, including shoulders, arms, legs, back, and abdominal muscles. As you stretch, move all joints slowly and gently through their full range of motion.

Maintaining flexibility makes day-to-day activity easier and can increase circulation. Improved flexibility can also help with your balance, something that is important as we get older. Take time in your fitness routine and include activities that work flexibility: yoga, Pilates, and stretching. Flexibility can help you stay active. And staying active is essential for long-term health.



Ask the Trainer by *Erin M Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT* Weight Training for Bone Strength

Q: Hey Erin. I just turned 63 years old and was told by my doctor at my last appointment that I should start exercising a few days a week. I was diagnosed with osteopenia so I need to do weight bearing activities. Do you have any suggestions? I haven't exercised besides walking in a very long time.

~Linda B

A: Hi Linda. Thank you for your question. I'm so glad your doctor has recommended you to start exercising. I deal with people over the age of 50 all the time and many who have had or have osteopenia, reduced bone density that is not low enough to be diagnosed as osteoporosis. First and foremost I would make sure you continue walking. Walk everyday if you can. Optimally it would be great to walk 30 minutes each day. If you have any knee or leg issues, be mindful of those and always listen to your body. If you are sore or in pain one day, take a day off to rest or do a shorter duration of time.

Now you can start incorporating strength training a few days a week. I would recommend 20-30 minutes 2x a week to start. I recommend light dumbbells and do basic strength exercises like bicep curls, rows, tricep extensions, squats, etc. Since it has been a long time since you exercised, I highly recommend working with a certified professional. A few personal training sessions will show you how to work out correctly. Make sure the individual you would work with has a background working with older individuals and can adapt to your needs.

You will be amazed at how walking a few days a week and incorporating strength training will make you feel. I've had numerous individuals increase their bone density by coming to one of my strength classes 2x a week.

Good luck!

Want to Know More?

Contact TCU Insurance Agency for more information.

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