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A Comprehensive Approach to Stress Management and Enhancing Well-Being

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So let's begin by taking a look at the broader landscape of stress in our lives at this point. So stress is one of the leading health concerns in modern society. In 2022, the American Institute of Stress released data from the American Psychological association that said America is one of the most stressed countries in the world. And they stated that they are stressed and feel paralyzed by stress. Additionally, 63% say they consider quitting their job due to stress, and 76 say workplace stress is detrimental to their interpersonal relationships.

Now, this is just one study, but I can tell you that the body of evidence regarding the effects of stress on our life is decades long and quite compelling. I tried to look up the most recent Data and in 2023, the American Psychological Association, Work in America said 77% of workers reported experiencing work related stress in the past month. Think of that. That is, three quarters of workers surveyed said they had work related stress in the last month, 57% of those citing negative impacts as a result, such as emotional exhaustion and lack of motivation to do their best. Now think about that.

We all take part in patient care. We're not motivated to do our best. Not only do we suffer, but our patients suffer again. There's such a large body of evidence that stress is very detrimental to our ability to work, play and love. Basically, why do we want to get calm?

Why do we want to control our stress? First of all, you're going to enhance your own well being as healthcare providers. You know how demanding this environment is, as do I. Being a healthcare provider, there's an increasing patient load all the time. There's reduced time with each patient, sometimes during our workday, but the constant pressure to achieve outcomes.

So if any of you work in a hospital where they measure your outcomes by RVUs, you know how stressful it is to say, how many RVUs do I have? How many more do I need to get? And, and yet at the same time, you're balancing the fact that you're dealing with people, your patients are real people. So that stress, if we control it, it will enhance your quality of life. And then you can stay present with

yourself, with your family and with your patients when you're at work.

Secondly, your clients will benefit from your knowledge and your demeanor. So your patients are also stressed. Many are facing crises, uncertainty, emotional pain. When you manage your own stress, you model those healthy practices for your patients and so you can talk to them about how you're managing your stress. When you see that your patients are stressed, and we're going to go over some ways to identify when your patients are stressed.

Stress reduction in patients is associated with bad, better outcomes, from reduced blood pressure to adherence to treatment. So if our patients are less stressed, they are much more likely to do the things we're asking them do to work towards their healing. So here's a case vignette. This is Elena. Elena is a physical therapist.

In theory, she allows 45 minutes for each patient. Staff shortages sometimes mean she has to take on more work in the same amount of time. So there's time pressure for Elena. She gets up in the morning, she comes to work already her first patient is late, and she has to compensate for that with all of her other patients down the road. By about 10:30, she's starting to feel tired and she notices she's not doing very well with her documentation because her time is shortened.

Then another colleague calls in sick and she's required to pick up two other patients during the day to get as many people seen as possible. So she's now feeling like, how do I attend to my own patients and take on other patients? This is very common in the healthcare setting. By about 2:30 in the afternoon, Elena is told by the administrator that she only has two more days to do a mandatory training. And so she knows she's going to have to spend her time at home doing that training.

And by the end of the day, she's emotionally exhausted and checked out. You can see here the stress factors in Elena's day. She has the work overload. She has the shortened sessions because of the time

pressure and incomplete notes. She has emotional labor because patients expectations weigh heavily on her, because she's dedicated to her patients.

She has administrative overload. Mandatory trainings add stress to her day. Then there's the physical fatigue, because most of us who work in healthcare have a true physical fatigue of seeing patients. So she has minimal breaks. We all know the joke that sometimes we don't get to eat or drink all day during our work day.

Minimal breaks and very little time to do the extra work she has to do. She's a stressed physical therapist by the end of her day. So, keeping Elena in mind, I want you to think about the stressors that you have in your work and I want you to use the paper that I asked you to have available and take a minute to think about the things you worry about the most currently. These do not have to be at work, so just the things you worry about most currently. So take a few seconds to write those down, please.

And now, next to that list, on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest. I want you to rate how severe the stress is for each item. So 1 to 10. 10 is the highest. How severe is the stress for each item?

Okay. Now take this list and set it aside because you will be referring to it later on in the presentation. So don't put it away. Keep it where you can see it so that we can use it later on in the presentation. Let's go a little deeper.

Okay? Let's see how your everyday stress is presenting in your life. So we're going to take a stress self check inventory. Right now. I'm going to give you the questions and one will be never.

Two will be rarely. Three is sometimes. Four is often. Five is very often. This was adapted from the Work Stress Inventory.

This particular one you're about to take is not validated, but because it's based on the Workplace Stress Inventory, it is considered an adaptation of invalidated measure. This is for your reflection only. Okay, so here's your first question. I feel that demands of my day leave me stretched too thin. One to five.

I struggle to maintain balance between my work and my personal life. One to five.

I often feel rushed or under pressure to meet too many deadlines at once.

I find it difficult to share my concerns or opinions openly with others.

Stress from my job or personal commitments carries over to my home life.

I don't feel that I have enough responsibilities or choice in how I carry out my responsibilities.

My efforts or contributions are not adequately recognized or appreciated.

I am unable to utilize my strengths, abilities or creativity in my daily life.

I notice stress showing up in my body. Headaches, stomach, stomach aches, muscle tension.

And lastly, I find myself feeling anxious, irritable or emotionally drained because of ongoing pressures.

And when you're finished, you can add these up, please, and we'll see where you fall on the stress scale.

Okay, let's take a look here.

The worst is going to be critical stress. Your stress feels overwhelming. Health and relationships may be at risk. Hopefully you're not there, but we'll find out. If you scored 1 to 19, you're calm and balanced, managing stress well.

Coping strategies are working. Cheers to you. And keep that up, please. From 20 to 29, you have mild stress. It's kind of typical stress.

Everybody kind of has daily stress. It's manageable most of the time.

When we start to get to the 30 to 36 range, you have moderate stress. Stress is building. Recovery strategies are needed. So keep in mind you're going to really want to pay attention to the rest of this high stress. Is 37 to 43.

Stress noticeably affects your well being. Coping is harder. And lastly, if you are in the category of 44 to 50, that is critical. Stress feels overwhelming. Health and relationships may be at risk.

So what I want to say is that if you fall in the 30 to 36 range, I want you to very assertively use the stress management techniques you're learning today. If you are at 37 to 43 and above, I want you to consider that you're really moving to a place where stress is going to affect you physically and emotionally. And definitely, if you're at that 44 to 50 range, I strongly recommend you check in with your primary care doctor or your therapist if you have one, and manage the stress very aggressively because you are at very high risk of having health issues because of this. And we're going to talk about why as we move forward. So please do not wait if you're in these top two categories to deal with your stress.

And I can tell you from my own personal experience that there was a time in my life, even though I have been teaching stress management for most of my adult career, there was a time in my life when I was

not paying attention to the symptoms of stress that we're going to talk about. And I probably, had I taken this scale, would have been probably at 44 to 50. And I was there for a very long time, months and didn't realize it because I was so busy at work. And I just kept plowing through and plowing through and finally my body got tired and it stopped me and I had a health emergency. Had I stopped earlier on in this stress cycle, I wouldn't have had a health emergency.

There's no doubt in my mind. So I had to take accountability to myself for the fact I wasn't taking care of myself. And then teaching stress management became even more important to me because I personally had such a horrible episode with it. So please don't wait too long if you're in one of those categories. And if you notice your patients might be stressed at a level at this area, please mention to them that they might want to check in with their primary care.

That's information for ourselves. But you know, what is stress? We use the word stress often, like when you're feeling overwhelmed. And that's true, but I think we almost overuse the word stress. So stress is biological.

Stress is body's natural response to telling you something is wrong. And when there's an imbalance between demands placed on us and our ability to cope with them, we become stressed. Historically, stress was that fight or flight mechanism. So way back when, when we had to run from saber toothed tigers or other danger, stress kicked in, we ran, we got out of Dodge, basically okay. In modern life, our stress presents more as social and mental and less physical and more chronic in nature.

So this has a more lasting effect on our bodies. Actually when we have this social and mental stress. In healthcare settings, stress is rarely about running from predators. Instead it's about that non stop patient load, the charting after hours, all of the things we saw that Elena was dealing with. But your physiology still reacts as if you're in that fight or flight state.

So take a minute right now, think of a recent stressful day that you've had. Did your body respond with racing thoughts, tight shoulders, shallow breathing? Write down what you noticed was happening in your body during that stressful day.

So those are the kind of things that stress management techniques are going to help you with as we move forward and learn this. First we're going to take a look at how stress affects our body. But also I want you to remember that it is important to note that stress is not always negative. A manageable level of stress can sharpen our focus. It can make us get moving, do something.

Probably if you've ever procrastinated about writing a paper or doing your chart notes and all of a sudden you have to do them, you will feel a little bit of a manageable amount of stress because it says, okay, we need to do this quickly, we need to do it accurately and it drives your motivation, it pushes us to excel sometimes. So in athletics especially, a small amount of stress equals a greater performance. We call this eustress. E U S T R E S S so we don't want to get rid of every single ounce of stress that we would always experience. We want to realize that that small amount helps us.

But when it tips over into the categories, we looked at the third category and above, we need to manage it. Here's our stress cycle. Something happens, an event happens, and within seconds we start pushing adrenaline and then cortisol. Within about 10 minutes, your stressor, it will subside. It's gone, but the adrenaline is still pumping.

Then hours pass, the threat is definitely passed, but your cortisol is increasing. If you have not dealt with that stress within a week, you have chronically elevated cortisol and that equals cell inflammation. And we being healthcare providers, know cell inflammation is never a positive thing.

Within about six weeks, you have weight gain and illness because that cortisol makes us gain weight and the cell inflammation makes us, makes us more prone to diseases. Here's another way to look at it

from the physiological. So the HPA axis, the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal pathway, I could rehearse that all day long and I'm still not going to get it right. Sorry. So when we talk about stress, it is not in our heads, it's in our physiology.

The HPA access, as you see, the hypothalamus, detects that threat in this first few seconds and it signals your pituitary gland. Your pituitary gland releases the hormones that stimulate your adrenal glands and that's when the adrenaline glands release cortisol. So this is the mechanism that's creating all of that cortisol. The cortisol mobilizes your glucose and your fatty acids for energy in short bursts. This is adaptive, but repeated activation keeps that cortisol elevated and contributes to fatigue, immune dysfunction, long term health risks.

So when you think of your HPA access, I want you to remember it's like an engine in your body. So if you, if this is your engine, your HPA access is your engine and it's running smooth and steady most of the time, doing what it needs to do, it's going to last longer, it's not going to break down. But if your HPA access is constantly stimulated and running quickly, it's going to damage. And if you think of your HPA access like an engine in a car, an engine in a car running slow and steady does well. But an engine in a car that's under constant pressure shuts down.

So remember, the engine inside of us, the HPA axis, is what regulates our stress and it will determine whether or not we move into physical illnesses. Very important thing for us to keep in mind for ourselves and for our patients. So let's take a look at the effects on the body of stress long term. So we know through research and through experience that stress is absolutely beyond a shadow of a doubt the precursor to physical and mental health issues. And like I said in my introduction, I worked in vascular surgery, neurology, pediatrics, and one of the things I consistently saw in working in all of these fields was that people were stressed before they developed a disease.

Let's look at all the systems that can be affected and why we want to work so hard to manage our stress. First is your musculoskeletal system. It's not the one that first comes to mind when you say, how does stress affect your body? However, when the body is stressed, your muscles tense up. It's really your body's way of guarding against pain and injury.

So stress equals muscle tension, the protective reflex. But chronic tension in your muscles, especially your shoulders and neck, equals migraines back pain, joint pain, and this can worsen recovery from a musculoskeletal injury. You want to help them understand that the stress is going to cause their other injuries to recover more slowly. Again, same thing with the tension. So the headache, the migraine headache are all associated with chronic muscle tension in the area of the shoulders, the neck and the head.

Musculoskeletal pain in the low and upper extremities and has been linked to stress also, especially job stress. So millions of individuals suffer from chronic painful conditions secondary to the musculoskeletal disorder. So keep that in mind that whenever one of your patients has a musculoskeletal issue, they're very likely to have a stress as well. Because as we know, those are painful enough injuries. And then when you feel that ongoing and we can help them to manage that stress, and individuals who are afraid of pain become even more stressed.

The second system, you probably are more likely to say, oh yes, I understand why stress affects the cardiovascular system. It's the thing we most think of that people have stress and then they have heart attacks, which is true, but it's because your heart rate increases and your blood pressure goes up from that fight or flight experience. So chronic stress equals risk of hypertension, heart attack, stroke, and even the inflammation of your coronary arteries, which then leads potentially to heart issues. Women are much more likely to have a heart attack. And that's in part because women postmenopausal have lost their estrogen and that puts their heart more at risk.

So if women, especially postmenopausal, are stressed for an extended period of time, they are more likely to have a heart attack. Chronic stress or constant stress experienced over prolonged period of time can contribute to long term problems for the heart and the blood vessels. So we're going to work hard to lower that stress and keep it under control. There's also some evidence that people who have chronic long term stress, it affects their cholesterol levels. Moving on to our immune system.

Our immune system regulates our immunities and reduces inflammation. So we know inflammation is not good for our body. Like we talked about with the HPA axis, we want to make sure that we're managing our stress because when we are stressed, our immune system diminishes and that's really our protective factor for a lot of other illnesses also it can affect depression and it can affect autoimmune disorders. Things like multiple sclerosis have a direct link to the patient having stress prior to the onset of multiple sclerosis and many other autoimmune diseases. Also the male reproductive system, the cortisol disrupts the testosterone production.

So lower libido, erectile dysfunction and reduced sperm health are a result of stress. For females, their menstruation is more painful, their cycles become absent at times under extreme stress. And a pregnant woman who's under stress because of the HPA axis being over activated has more risk of complications and also of postpartum depression. So women also have sexual changes because of distress and fertility challenges because of stress. So again, keep in mind your HPA axis is that engine in your body and we want to manage the stress so it goes slow and steady and does what we need it to do and not conk out on us.

Break down our engines. Need to be running your respiratory system. So especially respiratory therapists understand that stress is not helpful to the respiratory system, particularly if you already have a disease such as COPD or asthma. So because your oxygen comes to your cells through your respiratory system and then it also removes the carbon dioxide waste from the body, if you're in

stressful event and you're breathing very quickly, your respiratory system is not working effectively, so you don't get that oxygen in like you need and you're not able to get rid of the waste, the carbon dioxide waste. So stress and strong emotions can be present when your respiratory system gives you shortness of breath.

Rapid breathing and the airway between the nose and the lungs constrict. People without a respiratory disease, this is generally not a big problem for them, but they still need to learn to manage it. For those with those pre existing respiratory diseases such as asthma, copd, emphysema, bronchitis, need to be particularly aware of how stress is affecting their body so that they can keep it under control. Some studies have even shown that acute stress, such as like the death of a loved one, can trigger asthma attacks because of the rapid breathing and it triggers panic attacks because especially in someone who might be prone to anxiety. So working with a psychologist or taking a stress management class can help you to develop relaxation, breathing and other cognitive behavioral strategies that you're going to learn today to help you deal with that, to keep your respiratory system working the way you want it to.

And then there's our nervous system. So our central nervous system, obviously very important to us, has the autonomic nervous system in it, which contains the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. When the body is stressed, the sympathetic nervous system contributes to what is known as the fight or flight. The body shifts its energy resources to fighting off life threatening things or fleeing from an enemy. But remember, we've said in our today's world we don't need to flee from very many enemies.

Fortunately, both the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system have powerful interactions again with the immune system. And the central nervous system is particularly important in triggering that stress response. So we want to keep ourselves calm because that chronic stress over a prolonged period of time can result in such a drain on the body that your nervous system

actually starts to shut down as well. So it's not so much what chronic stress does to the nervous system, but what that continuous activation of the nervous system does to the other body symptoms becomes problematic. The gastrointestinal system.

So this is your brain and your gut and probably when you think about stress, you think, oh yeah, that's why you get stomach aches and things like that. So this is one that people think of when they think of being stressed. But there are millions of neurons in your gut. So bowel stress can be very painful, it can create bloating, it can affect how quickly our food moves through our body. So it can either slow it down and we get constipated, or it speeds it up and we have diarrhea.

Furthermore, stress can induce muscle spasms in the bowel. And if you've ever had muscle spasms in your bowel, you know how debilitating that can be. These are people with IBS and Crohn's disease. So stress especially will affect people who already have a bowel disease. Like I just said, if you have irritable bowel syndrome, this may be due to those gut nerves being affected by the stress.

And then that changes your microbiota of your gut system and that will change how everything works in your gut. There's another interesting finding that early life stress, so when your central nervous system is developing, especially like birth to 5 years of age, when these children have early life stressors, it will affect how their gastrointestinal system is affected lifelong, potentially, especially if they don't manage to deal with that stress. So later gut issues or dysfunctioning can actually sometimes be a result of those first five years of life. So stress doesn't just affect the mind, it's not in our head. It impacts nearly every system in the body.

Short term stress protects. But chronic stress will actually harm our bodies. So this is very comprehensive. But because we all work in physical therapy and respiratory therapy and speech therapy can be absolutely affected by stress, it's important for us to see and know these things so we can share information as appropriate with our patients. To help them understand why you really want

them to work hard on managing their stress.

Let's look at the behavioral consequences of stress. So eating too much and skipping meals, staying awake at night or lying in bed too long, increased drug and alcohol abuse, loss of sex drive, increased irritability, increased fatigue, loss of motivation. So stress is not just the internal experience. It manifests in our behavior and our cognition. For healthcare professionals, these effects can compromise the well being of yourself and your patients.

So you can have cognitive memory loss, poor decision making, impaired learning, your social interactions, your withdrawal and irritability, and your coping behaviors change. So your avoidance, you might start using substances, you disrupt all of your routines, and then your mood gets dysregulated because of this. And let's take a look at Dana. Dana is a speech and language pathologist. She works in an acute care hospital and she works with patients who are recovering from strokes, traumatic brain injuries, and complex swallowing disorders.

Dana is very passionate about the work she does, but recently she's had to cover for a colleague while they've been on an extended leave. So she's managing her caseload, plus some of her colleagues. Let's see what it looks like over time. Her stress. In the first one to three weeks, she's managing okay, but she skips her morning routine to do the huddle with the team to get started on her paperwork.

She starts eating lunch at her desk while finishing up her documentation. She feels mentally drained, but she tells herself she has to push through. By weeks four to eight, her sessions with patients start becoming mechanical. She has less conversational engagement with them, she feels distant from them. She avoids collaborating with the other professionals helping this patient.

And she gets complaints because she's taking too long. She starts forgetting to follow up with her patients. She gets irritated. By weeks nine and ten, Dana's at the breaking point. She snaps at patient's

family for interrupting her while she's trying to do a session.

She never would snap at a patient's family in the past. She leaves the progress notes incomplete and that leads to confusion for the care plan. After about a week of doing all of this, she calls in sick. Maybe once, maybe twice. She says she's burned out or she needs a mental health day.

And while she's off work, she starts browsing job postings in a school based setting, thinking that will be much easier. Now, I can tell you I've worked in school based settings and it's not going to be less stressful. But she has that fantasy, if I get out of this job, it's going to be better. So her patient care declined, her team collaboration suffers, and she's withdrawing from problem solving. And because of all of this, she is not doing well at work and her patients are not doing well.

A lot of this is not her fault. In health care settings, many of the things we just talked about will happen. However, when you think about this, who could have intervened? Who in Dana's environment might have intervened to help her before she got to the place where she's looking for a new job? This is why it's important for us as colleagues to recognize the symptoms of stress.

It's especially important if we are supervisors of our people that we are recognizing it. Dana's supervisor could have seen this happening maybe weeks one to three, definitely by the next few weeks after that, and pulled her aside and said, do you have any stress management skills? How can I help? What can we change right now, Dana, so you don't burn out? So that's why learning all of these things about stress is important for all of us.

Because we know in healthcare we work as a team and we work as a close team so we can help each other if we start seeing the stress buildup. Think about your own behaviors over the past month. Which of the patterns that Dana was exhibiting have you seen yourself do, even subtly? Okay, so just take a minute to think through this.

While you're doing that, I'll remind you of some of the things Dana was doing. So not writing her notes, avoiding collaboration because she's too busy potentially being upset with a family member or for a patient calling in sick. And have you found yourself looking through the job ads? Just write those things down and set them aside so we can think about those later as we move along.

Okay, let's take a look at the psychological symptoms and then we're going to take a break. So. Okay. Psychological symptoms of stress include forgetfulness, anger, frustration, anxiety, more irritability with family members, loss of concentration, depression, feeling powerless, dissociation, and more problems with schoolwork or your work. So the dissociation is.

Well, we saw it in Dana where she was kind of separating from her patient, not feeling as close to her patients in a severe form of dissociation, which is what most of us do not have. The patient literally feels like they're out of their body, they're not here. Okay? But in this kind of dissociation, it's where you get the distance and the irritability from people. You're dissociating from your normal life.

So let's take a look at Avital. Avital is a respiratory therapist in a busy metropolitan hospital. Her work is high stakes, especially in the ICU where she manages ventilators on critically ill patients. Over the past several months, patient volume has been rising, so it's probably flu season because we know how bad things can get for respiratory therapists during flu season. And she's been taking frequent on calls to supplement her income.

Here's what happens with Avital. The first one to four weeks of this extra stress. She has a persistent mental replay of difficult cases. So even when she's at home, she's thinking about these cases. She has mild anxiety before going into work.

She's wondering, oh my gosh, how many people will be coming in today, what emergencies might come in today. And she's having difficulty even relaxing when she's off work. By about five to eight weeks, she is hypervigilant. She is feeling on alert at all times. She's even startled by noises in her home or outside of her usual environment.

She starts having irrational guilt. She starts blaming herself when her patients decline, even when it's medically unavoidable. And she's noticing a cognitive fog. She's not concentrating well, she's not doing her charting as thoroughly as she would have in the past. She's forgetting conversations that she's having.

She's emotionally numbing, she's detaching. Okay, so that's bad enough. Right now we're in weeks 9 to 12. She has sleep disturbances. She's waking through the nights with racing thoughts about work.

She's becoming pessimistic. My work doesn't matter anyway. I don't know why I do this. She's relapsing and declining with her patients. She's developing what we call anhedonia.

So in mental health world, we call anhedonia as loss of interest in things that usually you love to do, loss of interest in being with your family or doing hobbies. She's ruminating, she is replaying minor mistakes over and over again. So you can see the results for her is she has angry and depressive tendencies, she has cognitive strain, she has maladaptive patterns, and she has emotion regulation issues. None of these are good for her. During her workday or when she gets home, she is Affected in every environment for herself.

So what happens is we have symptoms. So when I said she had symptoms, tendencies of anxiety and depression, those symptoms are present in most of us at some time or another. So we develop the symptoms that are present in us. That doesn't mean we have an anxiety disorder or depressive disorder or other disorder. We just have symptoms.

But then the biopsychosocial interactions. So all of those things that she was experiencing at work come into play with all of those symptoms. Chronic stress is the precursor to burnout. So what's happening is after all of these things start taking place, then she develops the illness. Illness equals a loss, an interference with your ability, Freud said, to work, play and love.

So when you no longer, because of your anxiety or depression or burnout, when you no longer can go out and have a good time or work or be in healthy relationships, you have then developed what we call an illness. So now you have potentially a full blown anxiety disorder or a full blown depression and the burnout. So the World Health Organization said that burnout is not a character flaw. It's not something that's wrong with you. Basically it has three dimensions.

So burnout has emotional exhaustion, which we've seen in these case studies. It has the depersonalization or the dissociation, criticism, detachment and, and it has personal accomplishment feels reduced. And we saw that in all of these cases that we've looked at up to this point. Burnout is not a personal failing. It is very common in health care and it's related to that persistent work related stress.

The awareness allows us to do stress management and mitigate the consequences of the burnout. So what we're looking to do moving forward with what I'm going to teach you is to catch it when we're having symptoms, to mitigate all the biopsychosocial things that are going to expand, going to make it worse, and then we're going to prevent becoming ill. So we looked at all the effects of stress on your body and your emotions and your behaviors. Now let's talk about what we do moving forward. First we saw the results.

First we have stress, then we had distress, then we had disease. It sounds kind of like, oh my gosh, what am I going to do? How am I going to deal with this? Can I avoid getting sick? And I promise you, you can.

So take a minute right now to identify one, either behavioral, emotional or cognitive change that you want to track for the next week. So something behavioral, emotional, maybe you want to track your irritability or cognitive change that you want to change this week and just put that aside with your other notes because as we move into stress management techniques, you're going to be able to look at those. You can take charge. Okay. And I love it when I do stress management talks that I say to people, yes, stress is going to be with us always, especially in an environment like ours.

However, two people can have the same stressor and react totally differently. And we'll talk about that a little bit more later. But you absolutely are in charge of how you let stress affect your life. But until people are motivated to make change, they don't make change. You probably know that with your patient care.

So what I deal with is I say you have to be motivated. When I have a patient who's coming in and they're depressed and they come in week after week and they're depressed and and yet they're not doing all the things I ask them and say, these would be very helpful to you. I have to get underneath. Why are you not doing that? And what do you need to have happen to be able to do that?

So for yourself, I want you to list your three biggest motivators to make change and deal with stress. It could be, I want to be happier at home. It could be I don't want to dread work. Whatever will motivate you to make changes to deal with the stress that's happening in your life. Go ahead and write those down, please.

And when you're finished, set those aside so they're accessible if you need them. And now I want you say to say this and I want you to say it out loud. It's important to say it while you're looking at it and out loud. So you're processing it visually and verbally. And your brain creates two pathways of taking this in.

So you can also say this preventatively. Let's say you were in those low categories of stress and you don't need a lot of stress management right now. You say this preventatively. So you're going to say, I can control stress, I will control stress and I will take care of me. There's nobody walking alongside you day by day who will take care of you.

Only you can take care of you. And it is not self indulgent to take care of yourself. So let's say it one more time. I can take control of stress, I will control stress and I will take care of me. I encourage people to put your motivators and this statement somewhere where you can see it frequently and repeat it to yourself.

So we know that in high demand settings, eliminating stressors is often unrealistic. So we can't change our patient loads frequently, we can't change emergencies, we can't change staffing issues that come in. Stress management skills act as a protective filter between the stressor and the impact on your physical and mental health. This means, like I said, two people in the same job can have vastly different outcomes depending on their coping repertoire. And we're about ready to build your coping repertoire as we move forward.

So we always want to have early intervention. You know that's true in the physical things that you treat with people. I know that's true in any mental health condition when someone comes into me and they just have symptoms of anxiety or symptoms of depression, but I don't have to give them a full fledged anxiety disorder. I love that. And I say to them early intervention is your best outcome.

So I'm so glad you came in at this point in the game. Same thing is true for our stress management. In those first few seconds to hour after stressful events, that's when you want to use your stress management techniques, if not prophylactically before you get into that situation. So you're going to make a commitment to your change. You're going to find a social support system, you're going to

engage in more meaningful activities and you're going to develop good, healthy habits, lifestyle habits moving forward.

These are things you're going to be able to do to take charge of your stress. So let's start with my favorite because all you need to do this is your nose and your lungs and you take your nose and your lungs with you everywhere you go. So there's no reason you can't do breathing techniques when you start to feel stressed. Breathing techniques will decrease stress and anxiety. They will strengthen your concentration and your ability to learn.

They slow your heart rate and blood pressure and it helps control your emotions and encourage happiness. So breathing is very, very important. I'm going to teach you three evidence based breathing techniques for healthcare providers. The first is what we call diaphragmatic breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing is when you put your hand on your heart and the other hand on your stomach.

And when you breathe in, you breathe in through your nose so that your stomach expands. So go ahead and close your eyes for a minute and when you, like I said, you're going to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth very slowly. So you're going to, when you're breathing in, you count to four. And when you're breathing out you count to six. So in through your nose, out through your pursed lips.

So let's do four rounds of this. Okay, Ready? Breathe in, out, in, out, in, out.

One more. In, out. And then you can open your eyes.

So this activates your parasympathetic nervous system. Okay. To re. And it reduces tension, lowers your heart rate and your cortisol and it's easy to do, it breaks in your day, it calms that acute anxiety and it's best for before a high stakes interaction. That's technique one, technique two.

This is called box breathing and you're going to, it's a little bit different. You're going to breathe in for four, you hold the breath for four, you breathe out for four and then you hold for four before you breathe in again. So we're gonna wait till this gets back to the one again and then you're gonna start breathing in for four. Go in, hold out, hold, do three more of those.

Okay, good.

So again, box breathing is used by Navy seals so that they can keep themselves calm, especially underwater. So there's evidence based that box breathing definitely calms you down. Again, can be done quickly in between patients potentially. And the last one is triangle breathing. This promotes a deep relaxation.

So it can be used pre sleep if you have anxiety right before you go to bed. And it could be used like at the end of your workday as you transition to go home. So and again, you're just going to breathe in for three, hold for three and out for three. And you should repeat this for about four cycles. So we're going to go ahead and try that now.

Ready? In for three.

Hold out.

In. Hold out.

In, hold out. Do one. Last one.

Good. And again. This is demonstrated to reduce anxiety and improve sleep onset in healthcare providers and the general population. The Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine stated that. So triangle breathing.

And then I'm going to show you this is, I can't use this because I don't have permission, but I want you to have this link because it's alternate nostril breathing. It's a yoga technique and it's a really impactful way to breathe using what it does is it balances both sides of your brain as you do it. I'm going to show you how to do it and then you can practice it whenever you have time. If you'd like, you can go to this video and see it for yourself. But I can't use it in the training.

Sorry about that. Basically you're going to use your thumb to cover one nostril okay. And then you breathe in.

And when you breathe out, you cover the other nostril out. Now breathe in through that same one switch. Breathe out.

Breathe in through the same one switch.

Breathe out. So it's a very effective. You probably would want to do this when you have a little bit more time. But if you look up this or just Google or YouTube alternate breathing or in India they call it prani ana breathing and it is a yoga technique, but it is also very effective. Not something you can do easily throughout your workday, but definitely another breathing technique you might want to practice.

So let's take a look at Sophia. Sophia is a charge nurse in a very busy emergency department. She just finished a tense interaction with a patient's family who are upset about the wait time. Her heart is pounding, her shoulders are tight, and she feels a headache coming on. She still has three patients to assess before she changed her shift.

The moment Sophia notices her breathing is fast and shallow, it's almost like she's bracing for a sprint. She knows she needs to reset quickly. So what does she do? She steps into an empty medication room. She does box breathing for five cycles.

Because of this, our heart rate will slow down. She feels grounded, she feels clear headed and she's able to go and take care of the next patient. So she has reset herself by using the box breathing technique. These are like micro breaks. They don't always require leaving the the room or the unit for a long period of time like she did.

She just stepped into the medication room really quickly. So. But the reset helps her emotion regulation which then improves her patient care and the quality of the rest of her day. So take a minute and think about when can you use breathing techniques in your work? And you can write down several, if you can think of several times when you can use breathing techniques in your work.

But this is the first thing we're starting to build upon stress management techniques that you'll take with you.

So I'm going to give you about 30 seconds to go ahead and write those down for yourself.

So the next technique is the hot pen technique, and this is one of my favorites because it's quick, it's expressive writing, and it reduces your stress by getting out all these thoughts that are running around your head that are probably making you more upset than you need to be. So you write without overthinking or editing. And we call it the hot pen because you write continuously and rapidly as if the pen is too hot to stop moving. So it bypasses the inner critic in you and you Just write what is really on your mind. So I say set a timer first, a short focus period, three to 10 minutes at the most.

Write non stop, don't worry about the grammar, don't lift your pen and just write. When you're finished with it, you can either destroy it, throw it away, discard it, take it with you. Whatever you want to do with it is fine. This technique only needs a pen paper. Some people use paints for this.

Whatever you need to do it, it provides cognitive clarity by the time you get to the end of it. Because you start out with all those judgmental words and all those thoughts and feelings that you're having. And what you feel is your physiology calms while you're doing the writing. And then by the end, you're typically writing less judgmental things than you started out writing. So the hot pen technique, very effective.

Let's take a look at how Ben used this. So Ben's a physical therapist. He has two patients who are making very little progress. One patient even screamed at him today before heading home. He takes five minutes to use the hot pen technique and he notices he's writing about his exhaustion and his doubt and he's not making progress and he's feeling overwhelmed.

But by the end, his tone naturally shifts towards more problem solving and compassion for himself. And then he throws the paper away. The result is he goes home feeling calmer and he can be present for his family rather than showing up at his house and complaining about his day. So this is a great technique at the end of your day because our days can be very stressful to just get all that out and go home to your family in a different state of mind. Let's take a look at our healthy habits.

So we're going to cover sleep, nutrition, exercise, no drugs and alcohol and nature. All of these are vitally important. We're going to start with sleep because sleep is critical for stress management. I cannot stress enough how important sleep is for stress management. We know that sleep is good for our bodies to recover.

And what we don't teach enough about, especially for mental health issues, is how vital sleep is. So when I have college kids, seniors in high school, who are getting ready to go to college, I say to them, one of the most important things I want you to do in college is make sure you keep your sleep calm and steady and scheduled. We all know what college students do when they get to college. They're no longer in their parents household. They have freedom.

Many of them end up staying out late doing all kinds of things that interrupt their sleep cycle. And college is when we first see mental health breaks oftentimes. So the incidence of mental health issues between the ages of 18 to 22, whether it be because you're going to college or because you've started a new job and you're under the pressures of a new job at age 18, 19 or 20, sleep is critical to keeping yourself calm and steady so that you don't move from stress to distress to disease. Sleep is the body's primary recovery system. When it's disrupted, your ability to handle stress drops significantly.

Cortisol regulation during sleep, it resets your HPA axis. So poor sleep keeps your cortisol high and it prolongs your fight or flight in your body. The deep sleep is where you repair your tissues, restore your energy, release your growth hormone. So chronic stress puts poor sleep with weakens your immune system and you're more likely to get sick. So we really want to be paying attention to the regulation of the amygdala system and our memory.

So our REM sleep consolidates our emotional experiences and produces better stress processing. That's why it is so important that we talked about cortisol regulation, immune system repair, emotion regulation, and then the psychological piece I've already discussed. And that's not just in college age people, but that is a large onset because of the big change during that age group. But you can have psychological issues at any age in life because of your sleep being disrupted. So when you're going to sleep, we want you to get seven to nine hours on your circadian rhythm.

So I say that because some of us are early morning risers. I love that my husband is early morning riser because he always makes the coffee and I get a coffee on my nightstand before I ever get up because I am not an early morning riser. It's important to kind of know that. And in healthcare it kind of helps because some of us can work first shift or you can work second shift. Some people who stay awake all night long love to work third shift.

So there's actually a guy called the sleep doctor and he has a website you can go to and take a free quiz, thesleepdoctor.com and then he tells you what animal your circadian rhythm is. So if you're. I think I'm a bear. So my ideal circadian rhythm is to go to sleep between 11 and 12 and wake up between 7 and 8. Well, that was not always what I could do, especially when I had small children, as many of you probably know.

But now I do regulate my work to my sleep cycle. It's an interesting quiz. Go ahead and take it. You'll get lots of emails after that, but it's worth it. Seven to nine hours on your circadian rhythm, and then you want to be in as dark a room as possible.

The darker the room, the better you sleep. Avoid alcohol late at night because it does disrupt your sleep cycle. Make sure the temperature in your room is nice and cool. So we really do want to sleep in as cool a room as you can possibly stand. And then set a routine for your sleep before you go to sleep.

So brush your teeth, read a book, whatever it is you will do. Definitely avoid screens. We do not want to be on screens. Before we go to bed, let's talk about Miguel. So Miguel is a respiratory therapist in a large urban hospital.

He is alternating day and night shifts. Last night, he only got four and a half hours of sleep. He knows from experience that poor sleep will make his day harder. So he plans to use stress management techniques to keep himself grounded during the workday. Okay, he doesn't want to become irritable,

foggy, and overwhelmed.

So he wakes up. He feels groggy, but he takes five minutes to do diaphragmatic breathing before even getting out of bed. He's doing his breathing. Then he drives to work. And instead of playing the news and getting upset about the news and having his HPA activated, he listens to a short mindfulness audio, and he feels mentally centered.

Mid shift patient's oxygen level drops and his adrenaline spikes, but he consciously slows his breathing. He adjusts the patient's ventilator. His hands are steady. He's able to communicate with the nurse who's assisting him. And after the patient stabilizes, he does box breathing in the supply room to calm himself down.

So here he is. He's arresting that stress cycle by doing the box breathing. Then later in the day, he charts, and during that time, he starts to feel overwhelmed. So instead, he breaks things into two smaller chunks. Chunks that's always going to help your stress management to break things in smaller chunks.

So at the end of the shift, because he's used these stress management things all during the day, Miguel leaves the hospital. He's feeling increased energy. He feels sharper. He doesn't even feel like he had less sleep last night. He's less irritable, and he has a good recovery.

He goes home at night, takes a warm shower, and he sleeps for a full seven hours. So the intentional stress management during the day really made a difference in Miguel's day. So you're going to take a minute now and you're going to write down several changes you can make in your sleep preparation. If you sleep with the phone in your bedroom or you're watching TV or things like that and you want to discontinue those, go ahead and write those down. Whatever it is you want to change in your sleep preparation, go ahead and write that on your worksheet.

All right, let's talk about nutrition. So the brain gut connection is real. We talked about that earlier in our training. So nutrients like magnesium, vitamin D, probiotics directly influence our mood, our resilience, and our stress recovery. So what we eat helps us deal with stress.

This is not about dieting. This is about refueling your body and mind with the appropriate things to help you deal with stress. So dietary choices, as many of you probably know, affect your hormone production. They affect inflammation, they affect neurotransmitters, they affect your brain functioning. And it's very important that we keep in mind that the things we eat are affecting us all day long.

So the Mediterranean diet has long been studied as one of the best diets we can use. It's not the only diet. So don't feel like you have to do the Mediterranean diet, but it is a very comprehensive diet. The vitamin C in the fruits, peppers, broccoli and cabbage help with inflammation. Vitamin D in your fatty fish, egg yolks, fortified foods, vitamin A, green, red and orange.

And then your probiotic and prebiotics are in the Mediterranean diet with yogurt, sauerkraut, fruits, beans. And your magnesium is in your probiotic diet with your leafy greens, nuts, spinach, legumes. Okay, so it's a very comprehensive diet that we know is linked to lower rates of heart disease, which is probably also linked to lower stress. So take a minute right now, you're going to write down several ways you can incorporate better nutrition into your work day. And believe me, I know there have been many days I did not get to eat lunch because of the stress during the day, the pressures, the, the load and the, the pace of health care.

But take a minute to write down several ways you can incorporate better nutrition into your workday. It could be things like just having a bag of carrots near your workstation, things like that.

All right, let's talk about exercise. So exercise regulates your hormones and your cortisol. So lower baseline cortisol over time helps your body recover faster from the stressors. You do not have to do intensive exercise to get this benefit. All you need to do is some moderate exercise that activates your parasympathetic nervous system to relax.

Okay. So the protective role of exercise on stress is a system deregulation. And it helps with all the comorbidities that we saw earlier on the body.

It also boosts emotional resilience. So the increase in endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, the regulation and resilience is increased because of those. It reduces your anxiety and depression. I tell people all the time when they come in with depression, go out and take a walk every single day. Let me know how you feel when you come back next week.

And inevitably, if they go out and walk every single day, they do start feeling better again in moderation, boost your resilience and improve your sleep. So we know that exercise helps regulate our circadian rhythms, promotes deeper restorative sleep. You'll have better sleep equals improved emotional and cognitive functioning. Again, it enhances your cognitive functioning, which, of course, we know is always going to be better for us in healthcare because we have to be able to think on our feet all the time. Also, exercise helps build what we call our killer T cells.

T cells are. Are a type of white blood cell called lymphocytes. Many of you know this, probably, but they help your immune system fight germs and protect from diseases. They, we can think of them as like the green Berets, running around your body fighting the diseases. When you exercise for 20 minutes, everything from 20 minutes and beyond starts releasing more T cells and lymphocytes, and they go around your body and they make you healthier, and that lowers your stress as well.

So exercise is not just physical. It's one of the most powerful ways we can regulate our hormones, boost our mood, and build resilience against stress. Take a minute and write down how you can incorporate a little more exercise into your day.

Go ahead and write those down.

And let's take a look at how Tanya did this. So, she's an occupational therapist. She has a very tight schedule. She starts feeling stiff mental fog and irritability. She works in an inpatient rehab unit.

Her schedule is so tightly packed, she does not have much time for her documentation and team meetings. And she's feeling that stiffness, the mental fog, the irritability. This is how she, Tanya, incorporates. So before her very first session, Tanya takes three minutes to go to the therapy gym and do some dynamic stretches. Arm circles, torso twists, marching in place.

She uses the walk from the parking lot into the unit as an intentional brisk walk, focusing on her posture and her breathing. Halfway through the day, Tanya has a six minute gap while she's waiting for a colleague. So she uses that time to do 15 body weight squats, or she walks up a flight of steps and down a flight of steps and she notices that her energy is much better, she's feeling sharper and she's ready to go to the next patient. Later on, she has to go and get some supplies from another floor. So again she takes the steps rather than the elevator.

And then while she's reviewing her notes, she will set a timer for every 45 minutes to stand up, take a 30 second walk, stretch her calves and then sit back down. At the end of her shift, Tanya takes an extra loop around the hospital. She adds a thousand steps by doing this and she uses that walk to mentally decompress. Before she goes home, she does the exercise equivalent of a hot pen exercise. She now has less tension in her neck and shoulders.

She is feeling energized, ready to go home and much less irritable than she might have felt otherwise. So Tanya did many things during the day with many exercises to help herself. Now I'm going to move on to yoga. I think yoga is one of the most important exercises we can do. Some people are like, there's no way I can do yoga.

I'm not flexible, I hate yoga, don't ask me to do yoga. I get a lot of resistance about yoga. Now I can tell you that when I first started in my career, yoga was much less well known. So the resistance I get is less today than it was back then. But still, for gosh sakes, my own husband is like, I can't do yoga.

And I said, okay, I get that you can't do yoga. I but let's just try to touch your knees. Because he couldn't even touch his knees and he, so he started doing that and then eventually over time he could touch his toes and now he can do yoga. So I use that story with my clients all the time to say, you don't have to start being a yoga guru, you just have to start practicing flexibility. And all of you know, especially the physical therapists in the audience know that being flexible is critical to our long term health.

Yoga is an evidence based practice for stress management. Because what I like about yoga, it's multimodal. So it combines physical postures that release muscle tension and squeeze out the toxins from your muscles. It gives controlled breathing, which regulates your nervous system and it gives mindfulness practice to help with mental rumination. And we're going to talk about Mindfulness in a couple of minutes here.

But research supports yoga as an effective tool for reducing perceived stress, improving emotional regulation and enhancing resilience in healthcare in the general population. So, so it's effective, it's multimodal. All of the poses are designed to help you calm, it creates a buffer between stress and it improves your recovery from stressful events. So if you can pick a few yoga poses to do after a stressful event, it absolutely will help your HPA axis calm down and stop pumping that cortisol. So you

can see on this screen that yoga, it's another representation of yoga.

Lowering your heart rate and breathing, increasing your flexibility, improving your sleep. Yoga is very beneficial for sleep and decreases your anxiety and depression, emotion regulation. And here's another thing I love about yoga. So at the end of your chromosomes are telomeres. Some people call telomeres telomeres.

Okay. They are the protective caps at the end of your chromosomes. Those caps, the telomeres shorten as we age. They especially shorten if you're under chronic stress. So yoga has been research based shown to help those telomeres stay growing.

So shorter telomeres are associated the higher risk of cardiovascular disease, depression and early mortality. Chronic psychological stress accelerates the telomere shortening. So yoga combined effects reduces the stress hormone that lowers the inflammation, that improves your antioxidant activity and enhances your emotion regulation and helps your telomeres grow. So I can't imagine why you wouldn't want to at least try yoga. Yoga does not have to be a one hour class.

So Dean Ornish did a study that said in a five year study of lifestyle programming, yoga, meditation and diet changes 10% increases in the telomere length. Another researcher said that a 12 week yoga and meditation practice increased the TE activity which is the enzyme that helps rebuild the telomeres. And lastly, another study showed that in older adults with stress related cognitive decline, yoga improved that mental health and increased telomerase activity which probably helps with that cognitive decline. So there are a lot of benefits from yoga. I mean Obviously in civilizations 5000 years ago they've been using yoga a lot.

So I'm happy that it is more in vogue here in the United States and I hope more and more people will incorporate it into their life for stress relief and for overall health. Here's some desk friendly ways to do

yoga. So the, the seated spinal twist is you've probably, some of you probably do this when you're feeling stressed at work. You just turn to the side and stretch and oh my Gosh, that feels so good when you do it. And you can do the, do the other side also.

Don't, don't not balance yourself. Make sure you're balancing yourself by doing the other side as well. Your neck stretches are just to the side and to the side. And hold it on each side stretches your neck. That's desk friendly yoga.

Forward fold is you just, I'm not going to demonstrate this because I'd hit my head on my desk, but you would just fold forward in your chair and you can feel the tension drain out of your body when you do that. And the chair supported warrior as you open your chest and you're engaging your legs when you're doing it. And you can find pictures of these online as well. And then box breathing is also considered a yoga technique. And you already learned box breathing.

So these are things you can do at your desk. These are 11 poses for beginners of yoga. Now, never start yoga if you have a back injury or other injury without checking with your doctor. So if you're going to start a yoga practice and you have any physical maladies that you already know about, don't start yoga yet. Check with your doctor or your physical therapist or whomever is taking care of your body and say, can I do yoga?

And sometimes you can find a yoga expert who understands how to help you if you do have maladies. But these are some very easy poses, except for the crow. I'm looking at the crow here. The crow is not an easy pose, but all the other ones are easy poses that you can do. And if you just try them once, I think you'll enjoy it enough and see the benefits enough that hopefully you will continue.

So take a minute right now and write down how you might try some yoga or incorporated into your everyday life. Five minutes in the morning of yoga is very invigorating for the rest of your day. So go

ahead and take a minute just to write down how you might write how you might use yoga. And if you're sitting there saying, I'm never going to use yoga, I want you to think about how you might motivate yourself to just try it one time. And you can try it at home.

You can probably find yoga on YouTube or other channels where you can try it at home and not have to feel like you're exposed to other people when you're not flexible. All right, let's take a look at nature.

So I cannot stress how important nature is for us. It lowers blood pressure. It boosts our immune system. It spurs natural cancer Fighting cells.

One of the journals from environmental health perspective said that they linked 12% lower risk of disease by the spurring of those natural cancer fighting cells. So nature is very important to activate the relaxation response. It lowers your cortisol, it definitely improves your mood, it restores your mental energy, and it enhances your cognitive functioning. Even people with adhd, we always tell them, go outside as much as you can. When I write a psychological report for parents and say, here your child has adhd.

And one of the recommendations I always make is get your child out into nature. The interaction with nature gives you better focus and attention span and it reduces mental fatigue. So get out into nature. Even fake nature is good. So put fake nature on your wall if you don't happen to have a window in your office or at home somewhere.

Fake indoor plants replicate the same thing. So it, it improves our well being by being out in nature. Take a minute now to write down how you can incorporate nature into your workday and life. So it could be that many hospital systems now are creating nature outside so that people can take a break into nature because they realize the health benefits of being in any kind of nature. Even putting sounds in your office of nature could be helpful.

Okay, let's talk about sunshine. One of my favorite topics. Sunshine regulates our mood. Sunshine supports our circadian rhythms. It increases our vitamin D. So especially in places in the north when sunshine decreases in the winter months, you really want to be supplementing with vitamin D. Also, because we use sunscreen, we don't get as much vitamin D. So while dermatologists would hate me for saying this, you can go out in the sun for 10 or 15 minutes and just get your vitamin D before putting sunscreen on.

And I have a good friend who's a dermatologist and she says not even one minute in the sun without sunscreen. So I'm sorry for them, but it reduces your physiological stress and it enhances your immune function. And this is just another depiction of all of those things. So it boosts your serotonin, improves your sleep. So taking an outdoor break in the sun is very important for us.

You can hold short meetings outside for some people, or you can promote staff wellness challenges outside. For people, sunlight is free, it's a natural stress reliever, and even small doses improve mood immunity and resilience. So take a minute right now, really fast to write down how you might incorporate sunlight into your day. They say getting up in the morning and walking outside into the sunlight, if you happen to be lucky enough to live where it's Sunny most of the time is very helpful for your mood and for your health.

Okay, consider a pet. I'm a dog lover. I will always have a dog. I went for two years without a dog and I will never do that again. Now I understand not everybody can have a pet, but if you can consider a pet, even something as simple as interacting with a pet can lower blood pressure, reduce your stress and improve your mood.

It's really good for healthcare providers. So it's a buffer against our workplace stressors. Pet owners report less loneliness and greater life satisfaction. Pet owners say that their pet decreases their

depression and anxiety. I have a lot of patients who use pet therapy.

I have a lot of executive coaching clients who use pet therapy because they're companionship and an emotional support, especially if you live alone. A dog ownership is linked to a decrease in 24% all cause mortality and 31% in cardiovascular death. Dog owners are more likely to meet recommended activity levels because we get up with our dog, we do things with our dog, we're not as sedentary and there's social benefits to having a dog as well. So it's lowering our stress and depression, decreased mortality, it's lesser social interaction. And owning a pet, especially for young kids, helps them to develop empathy and emotion regulation.

Definitely consider a pet now. Again, I understand that not everyone can have a pet either because of allergies and they're not always good for elderly people because of the risk of falls and things like that. But definitely consider it. And maybe not all of your life, but some of your life having a pet. The pets, dogs in particular release oxytocin and, and that oxytocin is what will help you.

It's the happy hormone. Basically. They release oxytocin and then you release oxytocin when you're petting your dog. Okay, we're going to take a break here now. This is a good time to take a break.

And when we come back, we're going to finish up a couple more techniques and finish up the training. So go ahead and do what you need to do and I will see you back shortly. The next thing we're going to cover is mindfulness and meditation. This is another thing like yoga that 30 years ago we would not have talked a lot about. And we also didn't have the Internet back then, so it wasn't like people could Google mindfulness and meditation and figure out what they were.

But in today's world, they are becoming more and more commonplace and being taught in schools even. And I'm really happy about that because the body of evidence has been around for years and years in writing, but even before that that meditation and mindfulness is really important for us. So

mindfulness involves paying attention intentionally to the present moment. So John Cabot Zinn is one of the people. If you really want to read a lot about mindfulness and meditation, John, it's Jon Cabot Zinn, and it's in your references really brought forth the need for more mindfulness and meditation.

He said the benefits to health care professionals in particular are that we can reduce our perceived stress. So stress can happen, but we can perceive it in a healthier way. It will improve our focus and our cognitive flexibility, which we definitely need when we're working with our clients or patients. And it will help us with our emotion regulation and resilience. When you're being mindful, just doing mindfulness, it's really about potentially, you can mindfully do your breathing techniques, or you can mindfully just sit, lower the gaze of your eyes, and notice thoughts without judgments.

So mindfulness and meditation are all about getting rid of our judgments so that we can be calm in our mind. So we're going to notice our thoughts, we're not going to judge them. And you can try short mindfulness practices while you're at work. Easily during a break in your day, meditation is a little, little bit more in depth. So meditation and mindfulness downregulates the stress response, reduces cortisol and inflammation, helps you regulate the emotions, enhances your present moment.

And I always tell people, you can get through each moment if you go a moment at a time, a moment at a time. It's easier to get through that rather than saying, oh my gosh, I got to get through this for a whole week. So we want to stay in our present moment whenever possible. It will promote our resilience and it will help us to be calm. If you start practicing, practicing mindfulness.

So when I started practicing mindfulness, I was. I was pretty young. I was about 21, and I did pretty well for a while. And then it. I just stopped doing meditation.

Then I went back to school to graduate school to get my doctorate in psychology. And one of my professors said, and just a caveat, I had four children at the time. The youngest I think was six and up

two years. Okay. And my one professor said, you're never going to make it unless you learn to meditate.

And I said, there's no way I can meditate. I am a type A personality. I have a lot to manage. I was working part Time also, which they really frowned upon. But I to this day say, had I not learned to meditate, getting through graduate school would have been much more difficult because it helped with my stress, because I didn't want to shortchange my family.

But I wanted to learn everything I needed to learn to be an incredible psychologist and to be able to help people so that I started practicing meditation again. And when I did, I had such a type A personality, my mind was all over the place. We call that monkey mind when your brain is jumping all over, when you're trying to be still. But I stuck with it. So the person who originally taught me to meditate said, do it a minute every day.

You don't have to do 30 minutes. And when, when you feel like a minute is good, go up to two minutes, go up to five minutes, and increase until you get to a place where meditation feels comfortable for you. And because of the health benefits of meditation and the mental health benefits of meditation and the stress reduction, I can't, I can't recommend it highly enough for people who want to deal with stress. So it is absolutely worth trying. So I'm going to walk you through two types of meditation right now.

We're going to do a guided meditation. And if you have, in today's world, you have Calm. The apps like Calm and App Headspace, I was so thankful when those were developed because it really helped my patients and my executive coaching clients to be able to. To calm themselves down. So I'm going to do a guided meditation with you, and then we're going to do a silent meditation.

So the first thing you're going to do is close your eyes. Most people prefer to have their eyes closed. If you don't, you can have a downward gaze. And you're going to do what I call a deep cleansing breath,

which means you're going to breathe in through your nose and count to five. You're gonna hold for the count of four, and you're gonna breathe out through your mouth and count to five.

So five in, hold four, five out. Okay, so do two of those. Go ahead. Deep in, hold.

And now I want you to keep your eyes closed and just breathe normally.

And now I want you to imagine that you are sitting on a nice grassy bank.

And below the bank, just a little bit, is a creek. And it's babbling along, making a lovely noise of relaxation.

You notice the sky, the bright blue.

You're sitting below a wonderful tree, and the breeze it creates is calming and relaxing.

And while you're sitting there, you start thinking about some things that worry you.

Perhaps one of the things you wrote down earlier is your worries.

And you start becoming agitated with those worries.

And so what I want you to do is look in the creek and see the leaves that are passing. They're floating down the stream and they're passing you by.

And now take one of those worries and set it on a leaf and watch it as it floats away.

Take another worry and set it on another leaf and watch it as it floats away.

And just keep putting the worries on the leaves and letting them float away.

You should start feeling lighter, calmer, able to enjoy the present moment.

Now you can take another nice, deep, cleansing breath and open your eyes.

Wonderful. I hope you can see how calming that feels to just imagine something so beautiful and imagine those thoughts being taken out and leaving you. It's a very good mindfulness exercise. Okay, now we're going to shift a little bit and we're going to try a silent meditation. And this is the one people usually find the most difficult because when you're silent, all of those things running around your head seem to be unbearable.

And, and sometimes they are. So I'm not going to ignore that. But what you're going to do is you're going to pick a mantra, two words that mean something to you. So if you learn this in an Indian tradition, they're going to give you a mantra that's written in Sanskrit, but like the universal mantra for anybody is so hum. S O H U m. Okay, so when you breathe in, you think.

So when you breathe out, you think hum. And you do it silently. Now, some people find it very difficult to do it silently, so they say the words you can pick. Be calm. I'm calm, whatever you want.

Just two words so that you do one in and one out. So, so hum or be calm. And what you're going to do is close your eyes and you're going to do two deep, cleansing breaths. Again, in for five, hold for four, out for five, and then breathe normally.

And I will keep track of the time so you don't need to pay attention to that. And we're just going to do this for one full minute. So you're going to stay in silence for one full minute. You're going to use your

mantra, whether it be calm, whatever your mantra is, and you're going to concentrate on those words while you're breathing. Don't force your breathing, just be whatever it is.

And we're going to start a minute. Now take another nice, deep, cleansing breath and open Your eyes.

So what happens for a lot of people is their brain jumps all over the place while they're trying to do that. And that's okay. Just stay focused on your mantra and it'll keep you focused. That's a silent meditation that you can eventually get to a place where you can drop into what we call the gap, which is where you feel really calm and peaceful and like there's nothingness. And they call it the gap and it feels great and you want to stay there forever, but as soon as you start thinking about it, you're out of it.

So. But I would highly encourage you to try to add meditation into your life. So take a minute right now and think about when you might meditate. I will tell you, hardcore meditators do what we call rpm. They rise, they pee, they meditate.

So first thing in the morning they get up, they pee, they meditate. I you heard me say I'm not a morning person. So I'm never going to do that. So I meditate right before I either start an important meeting with executives or potentially before I start a patient. I meditate before my patient day starts and sometimes I'll meditate before I go to sleep.

So go ahead and write when you might find some time to meditate, even for one minute. I do not recommend meditating in your car by the way. So here's another slide of meditation. How it works, it works with your brain, your neurologic, works with your body physiology, your body mind are connected. So they build resilience and stress recovery and then the psychological attention control and emotion stability.

Okay, now I'm going to teach you another technique. It's called tapping. Some of you may have heard of it. It really was developed in about 1993 by Gary Craig and it was originated from Roger Callahan's thought field therapy in the 80s. It's a simplified sequence of tapping on what they call the meridian endpoints.

So when you think of acupuncture and the meridians in Chinese medicine, the meridians in your body where your energy flows, tapping taps into part of that. It's designed to be self administered stress relief technique. And so it is designed for stress relief and the benefits that they say are stress relief and anxiety relief, emotional balance and mood improvement, possible reduction in cortisol levels and easy to learn, safe, low cost, non pharmacological, which is why a lot of people like it. So I started using this in my practice once I learned tapping. We call it the emotional freedom technique.

And you'll find trainings on this Let me show you this, though. So there's criticism around this technique. They say it lacks a scientific basis for the meridians and energy field. It also lacks methodological studies and they say that they may have flaws and the benefits may be due to other psychological factors like exposure or placebo. Which I can accept all of those things, that there are definitely weaknesses in tapping.

But because I've used it with so many patients and because there are tapping trainings happening all the time, even in our world of healthcare, I wanted to bring it up to you and let you try it so that you can consider it for your own use and potentially for a patient. And I'll tell you why. Because they can go to the Internet and YouTube tapping or EFT tapping points, and they can find videos of people walking them through tapping. So what happens is, is you do the tapping and you're saying things to yourself, so you're reprogramming. And I'm going to walk you through one tapping exercise right now.

So if you look at this slide, where you see top of the head, eyebrow, side of the eye, under the eye, nose, chin, collarbone, under the arm and karate chop, those are the tapping points. So I'll show you

how they look. So karate chop is just like this. It feels silly when you do this. I will fully own that with you.

Okay, so we're going to do that first. Then we're going to go top of the head, eyebrows, side of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, chin, collarbone, and then under one arm. Okay. So that those are going to your tapping points and I'm going to tell you which ones to go to. So let's look at them one more time.

Karate chop, top of the head, eyebrow, side of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, chin, collarbone, under the arm. Okay? So you can look at the diagram while we're doing it so that you see where we are. And what you're going to do is I'm going to make statements and then you say them as well. Okay, so like on the karate chop, side of the hand, I'm going to say, even though I feel this stress, I deeply and completely accept myself.

And then you'll say that too times. So let's get started. Think about a current stressor, maybe one of the ones you wrote down earlier. Think about its intensity, 0 to 10.

And now you're going to start with the karate chop. Even though I feel this stress, I am deeply, completely accept myself.

Top of the head, this stress, eyebrow, the tension I'm holding, side of the eye, the anxiety in my body under the eye, all this worry under the nose. This feeling of overwhelm. Chin holding on so tightly.

Collarbone, this stress I carry under the arm. Letting go of stress, releasing what no longer serves me.

Back to the top of the head, this stress. Eyebrow, the tension I'm holding. Side of the eye. This anxiety in my body under the eye, all this worry under the nose. This feeling of overwhelm.

Chin holding on so tightly.

Collarbone, this stress I carry under the arm. Letting go of stress, releasing what no longer serves me.

Okay, take another deep breath.

Tap lightly over your heart. I give myself permission to release stress and feel calm.

And stop.

So when you do that, you would go through that sequence three to five times. Okay. I have used this with many patients now and especially for traumas, small traumas. And I have seen over and over again how helpful this is. And what's nice is they can take, they can do it anytime they want.

They don't have to be in my office. Like another trauma technique is called Emotion Eye Movement Desensitization, emdr and they need me there to do that for this. They can do it anytime they want. So it's a widely used self help technique to relieve stress and negative emotions by tapping on your acupuncture things. But it's scientific underpinnings are a little controversial, less and less so as time goes on.

And it should be used in conjunction with other methods like mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy and other stress reduction. So you don't use tapping as the only thing that you would use. But I think it was worth putting in this training because I do think it's effective and helpful, even if it's placebo. I'll take the placebo with my clients. Okay.

Digital detox. Big controversies under digital detox. So there's a substantial body of evidence that shows especially social media is correlated with higher stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms. Just

this morning, before recording this with you, I saw an excerpt on I think some morning news show where the doctor was saying that especially teenagers who are on social media three hours a day are 50% likely to have anxiety and depression. I don't think any of us are surprised by that, but it's really important for us to keep that in mind.

We're having more and more research about how much stress our digital life causes for us. I'm always asking people to please consider getting off of your any kind of media actually, except for work or short term. And it's not a cause and effect all the time, but it is having some kind of effect on all of us. So the social correlation between media usage and likelihood of an anxiety disorder is shown in literature now. It also changes our eye shape.

So some. A researcher, I think it was Greenspan said that our eyes are changing in shape and it's causing our attention spans to be less than that of a goldfish. So we have less of an attention span than goldfish and then we have the fear of missing out. Fomo. So there's a high social media use is strongly correlated to fear of missing out, which then predicts higher anxiety, stress and sleep disruption.

People wonder why teenagers are stressed all the time. Because you let them take their phone to bed and they're up all night long. No social media, no phones, no computers in the bedroom at night. That's what I tell parents when I do parent coaching classes. And they're like, well, how are we going to stop that?

I totally agree. It is really hard to be a parent today, but it will decrease their stress if we get them off of social media. How do we do that? We can do some easy things like just turn off your notifications. They don't need to be on all the time.

No phones during meal time. Turn the screen to black and white. So it's not so interesting to you. Designate tech free hours, which should be most of your hours by the way. No phones in the bedroom.

I bought an alarm clock. You don't need to have the phone in your bedroom to wake yourself up. Go buy an alarm clock. I love it. It's the kind that the sun comes up and then the music comes on and I love it.

So it's a great alarm clock. You know those old fashioned things, alarm clocks. And then there's an app called the forestapp.com for the amount of time you spend off of your phone. Money gets donated to buy trees. It's really cool.

You should check it out. Okay, there is no WI fi in the woods, but I promise you will find a better connection there. Try the forest app. Grow your own trees. If you leave the app, your trees die.

So but if you stay focused, you can earn coins to keep planting real trees. Okay, let's shift a little bit now to stress at work, which I've kind of been incorporating through all this. But we can encourage self care at work, better relationships at work and professional results. Organization support is critical to sustainable stress reduction work optimization. So balancing shifts, adequate staffing, all of these things we know are hard in healthcare team communication.

So clear expectations and structured hands off time as well. Psychological Safety. In the next series that I'm going to do, I'm going to do a training on psychological safety. So spaces for debriefing, open discussions are all really critical. A wellness program could be helpful at work.

Meditation rooms. There are more and more hospitals now and healthcare settings where they are putting in meditation rooms, having counseling access for your employees. Exercise facilities at work. So small studies show that even a small organizational changes such as a 10 minute structured break can reduce the stress hormone levels in their staff. So when I present all of these findings and all of these techniques to executives in healthcare, they are always receptive and I don't know what the rate

of follow through is, but hopefully it's high because I can show them how much more effective their healthcare employees are going to be if they're less stressed at work.

Sometimes it's hard because I do work with so many executives in many organizations. Their stresses are totally different than all of the rest of the people. By me being able to show them the effects of stress on their workforce and they are much more likely to want to put in as many stress reduction things as they can in the environment. And then what can you do for yourself? Encourage time management skills for yourself.

Prioritize what needs to be done. Don't over commit yourself. I know that is really hard sometimes. Try to create a balanced schedule. If at all possible, weave in time for emergencies.

If you can, leave a little bit earlier in the morning so you get to work early rather than late and then set an end time for your leaving work. Especially if you're somebody who's going to be prone to staying for hours and hours to do just one more thing. Just one more thing. Just one more thing. No.

Tell yourself when you're leaving and if you do that for a week to a month and you realize I can never get out when I say I'm leaving because then you need to reprioritize something in your day and make sure you're using your day effectively. I rarely have healthcare providers who are not using their days effectively. But plan regular breaks for yourself. Again, I've been a nurse. I know how hard it is to get a regular break sometimes and delegate responsibility.

So sometimes we take on a lot that we don't need to take on. Okay. Positive attitudes say yes to life. I am very much a proponent of positive psychology. I incorporate it into all the work I do.

Whether it be executive coaching, team building. Psychology are all about focused on your strengths and do what works with your strengths. It's much less about pathology now I couldn't do that if I was a

medical doctor because they focus on pathology. But I love positive psychology. If you ever have an opportunity to just do a positive psychology, 1 11 overview, I think it would be worth doing because it really makes a difference in your attitude.

One of the most powerful tools we have for managing our mindset and stress is a positive attitude and happiness and respect in life. A positive attitude does not mean pretending everything is perfect. It means choosing to reframe these challenges when we grow. I'll give you a hard example of putting positive psychology into play. So Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist who lived in a concentration camp.

And he observed the people who did well or as well as you could do in a concentration camp, as opposed to those who either died or did very poorly while they were in the concentration camp. And when they came out, he wrote a book called Man's Search for Meaning. It was all about how we perceive our stress. And what he found was the people who could find some sense of happiness in their life in the midst of horrific conditions did significantly better than those who did not. I think more recently we all went through that during the COVID pandemic.

So the people who could still find happiness in their life and still get through and did better stress management techniques survived much better during the pandemic, especially in healthcare, where things were pretty awful for a long time. And there's a strong predictor of success and lifespan when you say yes to life and you practice a positive psychology. So I want you to take a minute right now and think of a challenge you've had recently and how you might reframe that a little bit. Remember, behind every hardship there's a gift. And if we can find the gift out of the hardship, we feel more positive.

So just take a few minutes now to consider a hardship that you can just change a little bit to be positive in some way.

And remember that positivity affects the body. It buffers against physiological stress as well. And when you can relax yourself with positivity, you're going to be more effective at work.

So if we reframe challenges, opportunities, we lower our perceived stress. If we buffer the physiological stress response and promote adaptive coping strategies, which you've learned a lot of them today in this training if problem solving and proactive planning and then strengthen your social support networks, which are critical to buffer against stress. And with regards to the longer lifespan, it's linked to reduced mortality and healthier aging. There are studies that prove this. It's associated with 11 to 50% longer lifespan in a large cohort study.

It may protect against health, disease, inflammation, oxidative stress. We talked about that a little earlier and it encourages healthier lifestyle behaviors. So when you have a positive attitude, you're much more likely to exercise, to do a better diet, and to sleep better. So developing a positive attitude is critical for stress management. You can also keep a gratitude journal.

In your journal you can put three things you did well today, three things you are thankful for, and inspirational quotes or biographies or whatever you would like. An example of this could be that at the end, if you're having a really stressful day at work, at the end of your day you can mentally think about all the things that went well. Like I'm really thankful that Angela came in and helped me with my patient. Or I felt grateful when my client told me that they were happy with the work we were doing together. I was really happy when I got a ten minute lunch break.

Okay, Things you're grateful for, things you're thankful for, things you did well today. People who do this report, if they do it regularly, they report that within about two to three weeks they feel calmer, they feel happier at work, and their perception of work is not so stress related. So they go to work feeling happier. So it's not joy that makes us grateful, it's gratitude that makes us joyful. Sometimes it's just a little change in the words make a commitment to yourself when you're managing stress, making that

personal commitment.

And it's not about perfection, it's about choosing to prioritize what really matters in your life. So you're going to start. One of the things you'll do for yourself after this training is write a personal statement to yourself about how you will prioritize activities in your life and incorporate stress management techniques. And then read that as frequently as you can, especially early on, especially like for the first month that you're really going to put these things into your life. And then accountability is key.

So review this commitment at least weekly. Then get an accountability partner. Find a partner, a colleague, a friend, a family member, anybody you can who helps you stay on track. Sometimes just knowing in on you keeps you going and builds your momentum. If it helps keep a chart, I'm a big chart keeper.

Research says that when we keep track of the things that we do, we are more likely to do them and we're more likely to continue them for a long period of time. So put your stress management chart up. Put your commitment to yourself up. Any visuals you have will help you stay on target and reward yourself, please. You know, a small reward for yourself for doing all of these things can be very impactful.

Let's not sit around waiting for somebody else to reward us. We let's reward ourselves frequently. Because one of the most powerful things you can do is manage your stress. It helps you, like I said at the very beginning, it helps your patients, it helps your colleagues, it helps your family when you commit in this simple way. So what have we learned here?

Stress is an unavoidable part of life and health care. But unmanaged stress does not have to be inevitable. We can take control. We will take control. We will take care of ourselves.

Today you've seen how stress affects your body and your mind. Why Evidence, Practices Matter what practical, realistic tools you can use right now, immediately your role as a healthcare professional makes you uniquely positioned to lead by example. When you prioritize being well, you strengthen yourself, you build your resilience and you teach it to your patients when appropriate. And you'll know when it's appropriate. So please make sure you're identifying these things for yourself.

I want to thank you again for being healthcare providers and I want to thank you for your commitment to this training and more importantly, to your own well being. So remember, stress management is absolutely not an indulgence. It is a professional necessity. Your patients need you to be present, focused and resilient. Your family needs that.

You need that for yourself. So please be sure you carry forward these practices not only for yourself, but for everyone and modeling that healthier living. Thank you for being here. Be well. And please continue to invest in the most important tool you have.

That's you. So have a wonderful day. Thank you.