Coping with Stress

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What we will cover today

- What is stress and where does it come from?
- Why am I feeling stressed, or more stressed than usual?
- Tips for coping with stress
- Questions/Discussion
What is stress?

- A feeling of mental tension or anxiety
- A normal reaction to life events
- Temporary stress is not a bad thing...
- Too much stress for too long can make us ill, or make our illnesses worse
Where does stress come from?

- **Environment**: everything out there
- **Social**: what other people do or don’t do
- **Physiological**: our bodies and symptoms

And... most importantly... our own THOUGHTS about these events have a big effect on our stress.
## Examples of sources of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Physiological</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• COVID</td>
<td>• Loved ones not understanding your condition</td>
<td>• Shortness of Breath</td>
<td>• “I'm going to get COVID and die”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Politics/news</td>
<td>• Loved ones being “too” helpful</td>
<td>• Fatigue</td>
<td>• “I can’t do the things I think I should do”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Weather</td>
<td>• Others being inconsiderate/rude</td>
<td>• Pain</td>
<td>• “My family thinks I’m an invalid”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Traffic</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Long COVID symptoms</td>
<td>• “People are killing each other”</td>
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### These thoughts can make us feel…
- Scared
- Angry
- Lonely
- Sad
- Worried
- Hopeless
- Helpless
Another example of how thoughts affect stress: The Fear-Dyspnea Cycle

Shortness of Breath → Anxiety
The Fear-Dyspnea Cycle: what drives it?

Shortness of Breath $\rightarrow$ Anxiety

Thoughts
The Fear-Dyspnea Cycle: what drives it?

Shortness of Breath ➔ Anxiety

“Is this it??”
“I’m going to die”
“I have to call 911”
“I’m getting worse”
Stress Can Cause Physical Symptoms, Thinking Problems, and Unhealthy Behaviors

- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Fatigue
- Trouble sleeping
- Stomach problems

- Problems concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness

- Overeating
- Skipping meals
- Drinking more alcohol
- Smoking
- Using drugs
Do you always have to pay attention to your thoughts?

Our thoughts don’t always tell us the truth!

Sometimes our thoughts exaggerate/use extreme language

“I’m going to die”
“I’m an invalid”
One way to manage stress is to not always believe our thoughts. We can also “talk back” to our thoughts.

“What are the chances I’m going to die today?”
“What would my best friend say to me in this situation?”
“What is the evidence that I am not an invalid?”
“Haven’t some people acted kindly?”

Can we simply “watch” our thoughts come and go instead of believing every thought that comes in our head?
Pursed-Lip Breathing can help with stress....

1. Find a relaxed body position
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose 2-3 seconds
3. Purse your lips and breathe out through your mouth, a little longer than inhalation.
Let’s try a brief awareness exercise…5, 4, 3, 2, 1
How awareness/mindfulness works

Your 5 senses

YOU

Your thoughts, worries, sadness

Mind Full, or Mindful?

UC San Diego Health
Your 5 senses

YOU

Your thoughts, worries, sadness
OK, but is it helpful for people with COPD?

- **Yes.** Several research studies report that mindfulness:
  - Can reduce shortness of breath (20-minute mindful breathing)
  - Helps people physically and mentally “slow down”
  - Decreases reports of psychological distress
  - Increases feelings of self-compassion
  - May prevent disease-related increases in biological inflammation
Learning more about mindfulness:
Google “UCSD Center for Mindfulness”
We talk a lot about “acceptance” as a way to cope with challenges in our lives. But acceptance is a difficult word…

I have to accept my lung disease.

I don’t want my lung disease!
“Wanting” versus “Willing”

Even though I didn’t want my lung disease, am I willing to do what it takes to live a meaningful life?

Do I want to exercise today?

Am I willing to exercise today in the service of what’s important to me?

What else am I willing to do in the service of my emotional health?
More tips for taking care of your emotional health
Keep Moving, and Get Outside if you can

Physical activity is important for your lung condition, and it reduces stress hormones.

Set alarm/reminders to stand. Or…Smartphone app: Stand Up! The Work Break Timer.

Can you take a walk, even a short one?

Natural sunlight helps regulate our mood and sleep.

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Plan your Day

- Keep a regular routine: meals, bedtime, wakeup time, physical exercise, time outside
- Get creative: is there a hobby you’d like to try? Or an old hobby you’d like to try again?
- Learn something new: learn how to use technology that’s new to you
- Plan/schedule time for relaxation, mindfulness, and/or prayer
Stay Connected to Others

Phone calls

Zoom
Skype
FaceTime

When was the last time you wrote a letter?

Send an email or text message

How about a postcard?

Checking Facebook doesn’t count…
Are you feeling stressed and overwhelmed by news and current events?

- Set a time limit for how much news you listen to, or how much time you spend on social media.
- Make sure you’re getting news from trusted sources.
- It’s OK to want to stay informed.
Trouble sleeping?
You’re not alone!
## Sleep Tips

<table>
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<th>Why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eat a light bedtime snack</td>
<td>Avoids awakenings from drop in blood sugar at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep in a quiet, dark, cool bedroom</td>
<td>Noise and light cause awakenings. Light tells our body it’s time to wake up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance sleep environment</td>
<td>Comfortable temperature, good mattress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid “trying” to sleep</td>
<td>Reduces anxiety/worry about sleeplessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limit/avoid napping</td>
<td>Napping reduces nighttime sleepiness</td>
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# More Sleep Tips

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<td>Reduce time in bed</td>
<td>Too much time in bed can lead to “broken” sleep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keep a regular sleep schedule</td>
<td>Stabilizes your body’s rhythms; limits time in bed</td>
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<td>(especially wake up time)</td>
<td>Watching the clock can lead to worry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliminate the bedroom clock</td>
<td>All can disturb sleep. Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol</td>
<td>Metabolism of alcohol disrupts sleep later in the night.</td>
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Consider an eye mask, white noise machine or ear plugs.
Keep a gratitude and compassion journal

At the end of the day, write down, type, or audio record at least one:

- Something that you’re thankful about
- These can be small things!
- A pat on your back for yourself (‘my hurray’)
- Did you do a healthy behavior that day?
- Did you not do an unhealthy behavior?
- A moment of kindness or compassion that you noticed in someone else
- Notice that some people are kinder during times of crisis
Know when to get help

- Feeling depressed or down most of the day, almost every day for weeks
- Feeling anxious or worried all the time
- Thoughts of hurting yourself
- Increase in unhealthy behaviors like drinking alcohol, using drugs, or over-using prescription medications
- Please call your doctor right away
- Go to the emergency room if you have thoughts or plans about hurting yourself
In summary…

• Stress is a normal part of our lives, but it’s been an exceptionally difficult few years.

• You can learn to recognize where your stress comes from, especially your own thoughts/reactions to what’s happening around you.

• There are many things you can do to manage your stress and continue to leave a meaningful and valued life.

• Are you willing to try them in the service of your health and well-being?
Thank you, and good health to you.

Questions and Discussion