Stress Management
Finding the middle ground between Negative Nancy (Ned) and Pollyanna

Cancer Connections - November 3, 2018

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Increasing Positive Emotions
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Making Space for the Positive alongside the Negative

• **Not** about denying stress or replacing negative emotion with positive

• Learning to **make space** for positive emotion alongside the negative
Positive Emotions in the midst of Stress

• Even when faced with serious life stress, positive emotions tend to **co-occur** with negative emotions

• People who are able to **continue experiencing positive emotions** during stressful times show better physical and psychological recovery.

(Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Moskowitz, 2003)
How do positive emotions help?

- **Respite** - Provide a momentary break from stress

- **Restore** - Help your body’s stress responses get back to normal when they’re stuck in high gear

- **Refocus or expand** your attention - Interrupt you when you’re caught up mulling over worrisome or depressing thoughts, so you can switch your focus

- **Sustain** - Encourage you to explore, learn, or make contact with other people
Positive Emotion Skills

- Skills have been tested in many populations with serious life stress
  - Metastatic breast cancer
  - Recent HIV diagnosis
  - Depression
  - Diabetes
  - Caregivers of people with dementia

(Addington et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2017; Cohn et al., 2014; Moskowitz et al., 2017)
Noticing Positive Events and Savoring
Negativity Bias

- Tendency for humans to pay more attention to and give more weight to negative information, instead of positive
Negativity Bias
Noticing and Savoring Positive Events

• Even when things are difficult, there are always positive things happening
• The key is to **notice** and **appreciate** them
Savor, capitalize

• Noticing is just the first step.
• Common responses to positive events:
  - Dismiss the positive experience
  - Move on to the next worry, goal, etc.
• Instead, take a moment to **savor and enjoy the moment**
How to Savor – In the moment

- Goal is to maximize your **focus on the current experience**
- Try to focus on each specific aspect of the experience
How to Savor – Beyond the moment

• Engage in behaviors that help **extend the positive experience**, making it **more vivid** or **longer lasting**
  - Write about it
  - Think back on it later and re-experience the emotion
  - Share with friends or family
  - Use mementos to remind you, like a photo or souvenir
3 good things activity

• Step 1: Write down 3 good things that happened to you yesterday
  - Things that went well or things you enjoyed
  - *Remember, these things are likely small and seemingly mundane, like someone making you laugh, something at work going well, or even enjoying a good meal.

• Step 2: Savor
  - Turn to the person next to you and share one of the 3 good things

Seligman et al., 2005
Benefits of Noticing and Savoring Positive Events

• Free
• Require only a short amount of time (seconds, minutes)
• Don’t have to change anything about your life
Mindfulness
Mindfulness

- Can help us manage stress and find the middle ground:
  - Make sure we don’t miss the good things happening around us
  - Better respond to difficult situations, instead of overreacting or knee-jerk reactions
Mindfulness

• Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, with an accepting, non-judgmental attitude
Paying Attention

• Noticing and attending to:
  - Internal experiences
    • Thoughts
    • Feelings
    • Physical sensations
  - External World
    • Sights
    • Sounds
Being in the Present Moment

- Focus our attention on the present moment, instead of dwelling on the past or planning/worrying about the future.
- Being present allows us to make choices and respond, rather than react to situations.

Diagram:

- Your body is present.
- Is your mind?
- Past, Present, Future
Non-judging and Accepting Attitude

• Being aware of your thoughts/feelings
  - Without evaluation or critique
  - Without trying to change/manipulate the situation or your experience

• Helps distinguish between the experience itself and the thoughts we have about it
Benefits of Mindfulness

• More positive emotion and less negative emotion

• Increased awareness can help you appreciate the good things you might have missed or overlooked

• Stops repetitive/ruminative thinking
Practicing Mindfulness

- Mindful moments in daily life (informal practice)
- Meditation (formal practice)
Informal Practice:
Incorporating Mindfulness in Daily Life
Mindful Moments in Everyday Life

- Brushing teeth
- Eating
- Chores – e.g., washing dishes, folding laundry
- Walking

- As you go through these activities
  - Slow down
  - Engage your senses
  - Pay attention to the task
Formal Practice: Mindfulness Meditation
Positive Emotions: Continued Practice
Continued practice: Mindfulness

• Each day, do 1 everyday activity mindfully

• Start with 5 minutes a day of meditation
  - Apps:
    • Headspace
    • 10% happier
    • Cleveland Clinic Wellness, Stress Free Now
  - Guided meditations online:
    • mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/
    • nytimes.com/well/guides/how-to-meditate
    • contemplativemind.wordpress.com/how-to-meditate-links-for-guided-meditation-practice/
Continued practice: Mindfulness

• Free Class – here!
  - 675 N. St. Clair St. (Galter Pavilion), 21st floor, conference room

• Usually* 1st and 3rd Mondays, 5-6pm
  - Nov. 19, Dec. 3 & 17, Jan. 7 & 28*

• Anyone affected by cancer is welcome, ages 15 and up
• Drop-in
Continued Practice: Noticing and Savoring

- 3 good things
  - Write about them each day
- Once a day, make it your goal to look out for something positive
  - On your commute, in the waiting room
- Savor in the moment
  - Pause, engage the senses
- Share one good thing a day
  - Post a photo of it
  - Text a friend
  - Tell someone in person or by phone
Thank you

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