

HEART MENTAL HEALTH NOTES

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DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Stress threshold is the point at which stress becomes overwhelming.
- ▶ As we age, our stress threshold lowers, and stress overwhelms us sooner.

NOVEMBER BEGINS WITH INTERNATIONAL STRESS AWARENESS WEEK

As we head toward holidays, stress can abound.

Q: What is International Stress Awareness Week?

A: International Stress Awareness Week was established to address the growing issue of stress-related health concerns and to encourage pro-active stress management. It was initiated by organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting mental well-being. International Stress Awareness Week has become a global movement that emphasizes the importance of recognizing, understanding, and managing stress for better mental and physical health.

WHAT EXACTLY IS STRESS?

The American Institute of Stress defines stress as the body's nonspecific response to any demand, pleasant or unpleasant. And while it isn't a disease, chronic stress can have long-lasting effects on our mental and physical health.

Stress is part of life. Everyone experiences it at one time or another. Stress is common and even normal. It's how we choose to deal with stress that makes the difference.

Unmanaged stress can lead to health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and diabetes.

Positive stress management techniques include learning healthy

coping strategies such as meditating, journaling, walking, and having a hobby. While overeating, smoking, overspending, and/or drinking alcohol might feel good at the time, these activities can be worse for our mental and physical health over time.

STRESS FACTS

- Around 75% of Americans reported to the American Psychological Association that they experienced a physical or mental symptom of stress in the last month.
- Adults ages 35–64 reported increased chronic health and mental health issues as well as financial and economic stress.
- Adults 65 years and older were worried about the economy and health but often pushed through stress without seeking help.

(Reference: Mental Health America, 2024; American Psychological Association, 2024)

“I THINK I’M LOSING MY MIND...”

This was my thought as I searched for the car keys, something out of character for me. Most of us have experienced this at one time or another. But, as we age, we become fearful we are developing dementia. Afterall, according to the NC Alzheimer's statistics, 12% of adults in North Carolina were diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2024.

But science also tells us this: as we age, stress can affect us differently. It can mimic senility! Stress comes in many forms and is a mental reaction to challenging circumstances. We worry about our health, our physical changes and limitations, our finances, our family and friends, caregiving, grief, loss, retirement, loneliness, and our world as we know it- including keeping up with the ever-evolving technology that sometimes seems to be leaving us behind. Whatever the reason for our stress, we experience it both emotionally and physically; yet the signs of stress can sometimes be easy to miss. Why? Because the condition is so prevalent in everyday life, many of us don't realize we are experiencing stress. But think of this: if something feels “off,” it probably is. Here are a few red flags that you might be experiencing stress: Headaches ♦ Digestive issues ♦ Irritability ♦ Heart palpitations ♦ Sleep disturbances ♦ Poor concentration ♦ Crying ♦ Social withdrawal.

What else can we do?

1. Remove the source. If you know what is stressing you, deal with it. Talk to others, ask for help.
2. Be good to yourself. Taking care of yourself is different from being selfish. Take time to eat well, sleep, do something you enjoy.
3. Move your body. When we actively move, our body releases feel-good hormones that promote positive well-being. Moving your body can be as simple as stretching each day.
4. Create a routine. Routine promotes a sense of confidence and control. It also keeps our bodies regulated physically, emotionally, and mentally.
5. See your doctor. Keep up with regular health screenings, monitoring and taking medication when prescribed. Don't discount a symptom of stress as “normal aging.” Work to be your best.

Whatever we're going through as we age, it's important to remember stress is real and we are not alone. So, find your car keys, find your friends, get out, and enjoy your life!

Wishing you Healthy Aging!

Julia

 Call me to schedule a training: 336-373-4816 ext. 258 or email HEART@senior-resources-guilford.org

We'll talk about topics and times!

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