Wellness Matters

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Recognizing the Signs of Stress and Building Resilience

April is Stress Awareness Month, a time dedicated to acknowledging the prevalence of stress and empowering individuals to manage it effectively. In today's fast-paced world, stress has become common, impacting physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. However, recognizing the signs of stress and adopting strategies to build resilience makes it possible to navigate life's challenges better.

Symptoms of Stress

Stress affects your mental health, but it can show itself in other ways, too. Here are some symptoms of stress:

- **Physical**: Headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, digestive issues, and changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- **Emotional**: Anxiety, irritability, mood swings, and feeling overwhelmed
- **Cognitive**: Difficulty concentrating, indecisiveness, or memory problems
- **Behavioral**: Withdrawal from social activities, increased substance use, procrastination, or neglecting responsibilities

Prolonged stress that is not addressed can become a serious health concern.

Coping With Stress

While it's impossible to eliminate stress entirely, there are numerous strategies you can employ to mitigate its effects and enhance your resilience:

- Plan and prioritize your most important responsibilities.
- Limit interruptions so you don't have to refocus each time you're distracted.
- Take breaks away from your workstation to regroup mentally.
- Listen to relaxing music to help you calm down.
- Limit caffeine intake, as this stimulant has been proven to exacerbate stress.
- Get some exercise to work off your stress.
- Try meditating to calm your mind.

Talk to your doctor if you struggle to cope with stress.

The Mental Benefits of Walking

Walking is often overlooked as a form of exercise; however, it offers several health benefits for both body and mind. This simple yet powerful activity is accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels, requiring no special equipment, memberships, or training.

Walking is a natural, low-impact form of exercise that can yield notable improvements in physical fitness, mental well-being, and emotional balance. Walking has the potential to impact your mental health in the following ways:

- **Reduces stress and anxiety**: Walking can have a calming effect on the mind. Walking reduces levels of stress hormones and releases endorphins, fostering feelings of relaxation.
- **Improves mood and emotional well-being**: Walking stimulates the production of neurotransmitters (e.g., serotonin and dopamine), which play key roles in regulating mood and promoting feelings of happiness and contentment.
- **Enhances cognitive function and reduces risk of cognitive decline**: Regular walking has been linked to improved cognitive brain function and a reduced risk of cognitive decline in later life. Walking enhances blood flow to the brain, promotes new brain cell growth, and boosts memory, concentration, and creativity.
- **Promotes better sleep patterns and quality**: Physical activity helps regulate sleep patterns and improve sleep quality, increasing daytime vitality.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends adults should do at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week. Brisk walking for 30 minutes at least five days a week is a great way to meet that goal and boost your mental health and overall well-being.
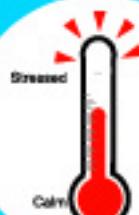
Just Walk

Walking reduces your risk of heart attack by raising "good" cholesterol and lowering "bad" cholesterol levels.

BAD **GOOD**

Walking reduces your risk of developing high blood pressure and other forms of heart disease.

Regular walking reduces your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and improves your body's ability to process sugar.

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Stressed

Calm

A brisk walk is a great way to reduce stress, depression and feelings of anxiety.

Just 30 minutes of walking a day can make you healthier and more energetic. So what are you waiting for? *Start walking!*