



Finding ways to reduce stress is important for good health



The air conditioner broke this morning, and we all know how hot those Pittsburgh summer days can get; my Mother has to be at the doctors by 10am but of course my car is being fixed; my granddaughter's softball league is playing at the middle school tonight at 7pm and my Family is meeting here for dinner before the game; I need to clean the house a little before my Family gets here; throw something together for dinner;

and to top it all off my grandson is getting married in two weeks and getting ready for the wedding alone is putting my stress level through the roof!

We have all been in this situation when problems, responsibilities, and special occasions all seem to come up at once. During these times it seems like everything will pass; but dealing with stress for a prolonged period of time can negatively affect our health.

Prolonged stress can lead to depression and other medical conditions. Stress is something that we deal with everyday, whether big or small. Learning how to control this unwelcome guest is another challenge.

There are many stressful events that occur in our lives. No one is stress free. Some stressors may be considered good or happy stressors, while others are bad. What is stressful to one person may not be as stressful to another. Sometimes there are changes in our lives that we cannot control. Some examples include:

- Family and personal medical issues
- Birth of children and grandchildren
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Relocation of residence
- Travel
- Financial troubles

When stressful situations come up and are not dealt with, they can lead to depression. A major myth about depression is that with increased age comes an increased level of depression. Depression, however, is not a normal part of aging. Untreated depression can result in delayed recovery and can even weaken your immune system. It is during stressful situations like the ones

listed above when depression should be discussed with your family members and your doctor. It is important to be aware that depression and stress go hand and hand. Symptoms of depression include:

- A persistent sad or low mood
- Difficulties sleeping or staying awake
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Eating more or less than usual
- Restlessness or agitation
- Persistent headaches, stomachaches, or chronic pain
- Feeling nervous or "empty"
- Moving or talking more slowly than usual

Stress management is important. There are many ways to fight stress, here are just a few to consider:

- Exercise
- Eat well balanced meals
- Write your emotions down on paper
- Get involved, volunteer, join a group, and interact with people, even if you don't feel like being around people, it is important!
- JUST SAY NO! — If you feel like you are overloaded it is ok to say no to another thing to add onto your plate.
- Try to put a positive spin on negative situations or thoughts.

Remember that even though you may not have been able to control the events that have happened, you do still have control over your life!

Whether it be one thing or 10 things all at once on your plate, it is important to control your stress levels. Stress is something that you are going to encounter in your life, but with the right tools you can try to work through those hard times.

It is important though to go see your doctor if you feel too overwhelmed both physically and emotionally, because prolonged stress can result in medical problems that if detected early can be treated appropriately. Combating depression is one of the "10 Keys" to Healthy Aging. Managing stress can help to combat depression and lead to a "Healthier Tomorrow".

This column was written by Sydney Etheredge, Center for Healthy Aging Student Intern. For more information please call 412-580-1313. For more Information about Depression, check out the Center for Healthy Aging's Website at www.healthyaging.pitt.edu, www.latelifedepression.org and www.mayoclinic.com

CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Center for Disease Control. For questions and more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit www.healthyaging.pitt.edu

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