

MY student newsletter

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Stress Awareness Month: Counseling for Stress Management?

Despite the many stress management tips that exist, not everyone can decide which ones will work best or how to apply them consistently for the desired impact. This is where professional counseling can help. Consider seeking support when faced with persistent, overwhelming stress that you believe interferes with your daily functioning. Physical symptoms of stress like headaches, gastrointestinal issues, or consistent sleep problems are also indicators that it is time to seek support. Typically, when stress is unmanageable, it will negatively affect your relationships with your family, friends, and colleagues. Based on the signs mentioned above, it may be beneficial to reach out to your company's Student Assistance Program (SAP) or seek additional support and resources. Doing so can provide you with the necessary help and tools, including lifelong skills, to better manage stress both now and in the future.

What a Small Garden Can Do for Wellness

Spring is the perfect time to explore gardening—for both fresh produce and enhanced well-being. You can start with a single pot or a square foot of space, and with a bit of sunlight, you can seize this wellness opportunity and help manage stress. Gardening promotes relaxation, relieves tension, enhances mood, improves emotional well-being, encourages mindfulness, and gives you a sense of grounding, connection to the world around you, awe of nature, and achievement. A larger garden will give you loads of exercise too. Start today—a handful of seeds is only a couple of bucks!

Resource: "Square-Foot Gardening: A Beginner's Guide" Mel Bartholomew

Could Keeping a Happiness Journal Lengthen Your Life?

Journaling (expressive writing) has been studied scientifically. It's considered a powerful tool to support change, overcome challenges, and accelerate goal achievement. It is often used to support therapy and medical treatment. This includes anxiety, depression, grief, and stress. It's not a gimmick. UCLA scientists in a brain-imaging study discovered that putting feelings into words produces therapeutic changes in the brain. The real news is that everyone can benefit from journaling, and the theme you might want to consider is "happiness." Journaling daily about happy moments in your life may lead to more of them, an upbeat mood, and perhaps a longer life, because happy people have been shown to live longer. Learn more by reading "The Healing Power of Journaling" by Zoe McKey.

Source: www.newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/Putting-Feelings-Into-Words-Produces-8047

Overcome Resistance and Achieve More with Micro Habits

Micro habits are tiny, easily achievable actions linked to goals and are seamlessly integrated into daily routines. They circumvent resistance to change, offering a pathway past the intimidation of large goals that can keep us from what we desire most. Micro habits wield significant influence due to their cumulative impact. It starts with small, manageable tasks. Resistance is almost nil. These behaviors then foster discipline and momentum, and this paves the way for larger successes. For instance, one daily pushup may seem trivial, but starting with just one and gradually adding more can evolve into a robust exercise routine over time. Delve deeper into this potentially life-changing strategy by reading "The Power of Tiny Wins: Building Success Through Micro Habits" (2024).

Reduce Personal Risk When Using Antidepressants

One in eight people takes an antidepressant. Do you or a loved one use an antidepressant? Dozens of antidepressants exist (e.g., Paxil, Zoloft, Prozac), but they are not without risk. Although antidepressants may help patients overcome depression, manage anxiety, and improve sleep, follow your doctor's instructions closely, especially while waiting for a specific medication to take effect and relieve your symptoms. Doctors typically seek to identify the right medication via short trials, and during this time communication is critical. Since 2004, the Food and Drug Administration has required patients to be informed that there is an increased risk of suicidal thoughts in children and adolescents who use antidepressants. Research is mixed about suicidality, but the warning now also applies to young adults who take antidepressants. One study showed more risk during the first week or so, and another study found that supportive psychotherapy was very helpful in reducing such risk. Tips: 1) report any increased agitation or anxiety to your doctor after starting an antidepressant; 2) expect your doctor to follow your reactions to the new medication closely initially—if this communication seems less than you anticipated, reach out; 3) have a thorough discussion with your doctor about the potential risks and benefits of antidepressant treatment but be aware that the benefits can far outweigh the risks; 4) educate yourself about antidepressants and how they work; and 5) discuss with your doctor how adopting a healthy lifestyle—through regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and enjoyable activities—can complement your medication in treating your condition.

Learn more at clevelandclinic.org/health (search "antidepressants-depression-medication").

Self-Motivation vs. Self-Discipline for Enhanced Success

Self-motivation is the inner drive to achieve a goal, but self-discipline is what makes things happen. Self-motivation is easier to come by than self-discipline. You may know this already if you didn't stick to the action steps of a New Year's resolution. Self-discipline includes consistently resisting distractions, frequently delaying gratification, and adhering to routines or plans, even in the face of challenges. To improve self-discipline: 1) decide on—and visualize—a goal; 2) divide the goal into small tasks; 3) repeat #2, with the tasks made even smaller; 4) fit the tasks into time slots of an existing daily routine—a key point because a routine pulls you along with less reliance on willpower to act; and 5) reward your successes, big and small.

New resource: "Self-Discipline: How to Keep Mental Control to Provide Self-Improvement and Achieve Goals Every Day" (December 2023)

Do You Have “Smiling Depression?”

Symptoms of depression may include, among others, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, crying, low energy, sadness, and difficulty feeling pleasure or participating in hobbies or activities that were once valued. Like other health problems that can affect behavior and are obvious to others, those with depression may mask their symptoms at work in order to appear engaged, in control, and happy. On the surface some depressed people may appear fine, but denial and fear of being seen and identified by others as being depressed are covered up because of fear of the repercussions on their employment. Embarrassment may also cause some persons with depression to mask their true experience. Some medical professionals have referred to this as “smiling depression.” Are you showing a smile on the outside while feeling miserable on the inside and keeping depression a secret? Speak to your SAP or a mental health professional and get the real happiness back.

Understanding Alcohol's Impact on Health Beyond the Hangover

Acetaldehyde is a toxic substance produced by your liver when alcohol is metabolized (and is a main contributor to a hangover). But acetaldehyde is also considered a carcinogen. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that consuming three or more alcoholic drinks daily raises the risk of stomach and pancreatic cancers, but heavy alcohol use is also a risk factor for cancers of the head and neck (mouth, throat, and voice box), liver, colon, rectum, and breast. Strong suspicions are associated with prostate cancer as well. Is addressing a potential alcohol use disorder a priority for you? Begin with a free, confidential assessment through your SAP or consult with a professional treatment provider. Learn more at www.cdc.gov (search “alcohol and cancer”).