



NYU Grossman School of Medicine

Project ADHERE

Blood Pressure Education Program

Session 2: Stress Management (HTN+RD)

Addressing Disparities in Hypertension and Reducing Racial inequity through Engagement

As of February 22, 2024

Session Objectives

- Understand how stress can affect your health
- Understand the relationship between racism / racial discrimination, stress, and high blood pressure
- Learn how to manage stress

Overview

- Discussion of Stress
- Stress and Racism
- Stress Management Strategies
- Shift and Persist Discussion
- Mindfulness Activity
- SMART Health Goals

What is stress? How does it affect your blood pressure?

- **Stress is tension or pressure.** Stress is a natural part of living life. Any change, good or bad, big or small, can cause stress.
- Stress is not always bad for you but **having stress too often can be bad for your body, mood, and behaviors**
- In dangerous situations, your body's response to stress gets it ready to fight or run away.
 - If you are walking in the woods and a snake is right in front of you, your brain will tell your body to either fight the snake or run away. Your heart rate and breathing will increase in order to help your body do this.
 - Your brain and body react the same way to stress, whether you are in danger or under a lot of pressure at work or at home, or from everyday lived experiences.
- **Frequent stress means your body is too often ready to fight or run away, which increases your blood pressure.**

Effects of stress on your body

Effects on your body right away:

Muscle tension

Temporary increase in blood pressure

Heart beats faster and harder

Raises blood sugar

Cold or clammy hands, Sweating

Shaking

Breathing harder and faster

Trouble sleeping

Headache

Trouble remembering or concentrating

Effects on your body over time:

Headaches, migraine, muscle pain

Can lead to high blood pressure

Increased chance of having a heart attack or stroke

Can lead to Type 2 Diabetes

Weakens immune system, frequent colds/infections

Weight gain

Digestive problems, upset stomach

Speeds up aging process

Low energy

Increased chance of infertility

Note: the rows do not correspond between effects on the body right away versus over time

Effects of Stress on your mood

Stress can make you feel:

A lot of tension or constant worrying

Restless

Forgetful, disorganized

Unmotivated, unable to focus

Feeling like you are losing control

Irritable or angry

Seeing everything in a negative way

Sad



How do you feel when you are stressed?

Effects of stress on your behavior

When you are stressed, it may be harder to focus on keeping up with a healthy lifestyle. Are there any behaviors you tend to do when you are stressed?

Stress can cause you to:

Eat too much, or eat to feel better rather than because of hunger

Eat too little

Have angry outbursts

Smoke or use tobacco

Drink too much alcohol

Not want to spend time with family and friends

Exercise less

Put off or avoid responsibilities



Discussion: What causes stress in your life?

Do you feel these stress triggers daily? Have you always felt this way?

How do these issues impact your health?

How do these issues impact your ability to manage your blood pressure?



Discussion: Does your community experience racism or racial discrimination? How does this affect health?

- Have you had a personal experience in which you were treated badly because of your race or ethnicity, or you saw someone else treated this way?
 - What happened? How did you *feel*?
- Do you feel stress or discomfort when expressing your true ethnic or multicultural background due to how others might judge you, or do you remain silent?
- Do you feel prejudice because of your race or ethnic background?
- How do you feel this impacts your health and your ability to manage your blood pressure?

Relationship between racism, stress, and blood pressure

- Racial or ethnic discrimination are social stressors in which people are targeted for unfair treatment because of their race or ethnicity.
- Racial discrimination can cause stress, contributing to high blood pressure and a diagnosis of hypertension

Long-term Sadness

Long-term sadness and worry can be harmful for your overall health.

You may:

- Want to spend a lot of time alone
- Feel hopeless and guilty
- Have trouble focusing or remembering
- Lie down and sleep a lot
- Eat too much, or not feel like eating at all

If you are feeling like this for a **LONG** period of time, it is best to speak to your doctor.

Shift & Persist Strategies

- Strategy to reframe stressors in a more positive way.
- **Shift and Persist**
 - It is when we give ourselves time to process a situation or our own emotions
 - You use your own inner resources – your capacity to shift the focus of your attention – to give yourself some mental space to consider the problems you face.

Shift & Persist

- There are 3 kinds of “shifting”

1. Shifting the focus to something else

- i. Bring your attention to your breathing, body, sounds/surroundings when feeling anxious/stressed

2. Shifting to a higher level

- i. When feeling anxious/stressed question “*where does this anxiety/stress come from?*”

3. Shifting to another person’s point of view

- i. “*what is that person going through that could explain their actions towards me?*”

Shift & Persist

- Mrs. J went to the grocery store and a worker was very rude to her when she asked for help. This made Mrs. J very upset.
- She took a breath and thought about what she needed to make for dinner. (SHIFTED THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION). That helped her calm down.
- Then she thought about her grandmother, who faced very tough times. This shift allowed her to remind herself that across generations, people in her family have overcome discrimination and she will, too. (SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE- TO A HIGHER LEVEL)– (I.E., shifting up to see the situation from a different level).
- Then she looked a little closer at the person who had harassed her and saw how angry and beaten down he looked. This enabled her to see the situation from the other person's perspective and recognize that it was the problem of the other person (i.e., the other person's difficulties), and she had the strength to handle it (SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE – SHIFTING THE POINT OF VIEW).

Shift & Persist

- What would you have done in this situation?
- Has there been a time where you have been able to shift your focus and attention?
 - What happened?
 - How did you react?

Why talk about stress?

Talking about stress is important because you can:

- Recognize how much you're going through – it's a lot!
- Feel a sense of community by sharing with others
- Feel proud of how much you're doing
- Start to think about what sources of stress you **can** control and what you **cannot** control

Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress

Because stress can have such a big impact on health, learning to manage stress is important.

- Take care of yourself.
 - Eat healthy meals.
 - Exercise regularly, and do it with a buddy (learn more about this on session 4!)
 - Exercise reduces stress hormones and causes your body to release “happy hormones.”
 - Get plenty of sleep (7-9 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night).
 - Give yourself a break and ask for help and appreciation when you need it. Recognize where you have control and where you don't.
- Talk to others. Share your problems and how you are feeling with a family member, friend, or health provider.
- Stay connected to the present moment and reflect on how you are feeling.
 - Practice mindfulness, meditation, or use prayer
 - Practice gratitude/appreciation and joy

Discussion: What do you value, and how does this give you strength?

Identifying and focusing on your most important values can protect against the damaging effects of stress.



Giving Appreciation

Expressing gratitude or giving thanks can improve your relationship with your family and friends.

- It is important to tell your loved ones why you appreciate them.
 - “Thank you for cooking this delicious, healthy meal today.”
 - “Thank you for working hard today to provide for our family.”

Asking for Appreciation

- It is also important for you to share with them ways in which you would like to receive appreciation.
 - “It makes me happy when you tell me you love me.”

Mindfulness

- In many religions, we are asked:
 - To be more present in prayer
 - To have more control over our wandering minds and desires.
- Mindfulness focuses on the present and not worrying about the past or future.
- Mindfulness can help train our minds to become more **disciplined** and can help our regular worship and daily activities.

Practicing Mindfulness

- Notice when you begin to have thoughts/ feelings/ emotions
 - If someone offends you, notice how that makes you feel. Angry? Sad? Upset?

It is okay to feel this way.

Practicing Mindfulness

- Mindfulness gives you enough time to act on the positive emotions and get rid of the negative emotions
- Instead of reacting right away, stop to examine your emotions and the situation.
- Know that these feelings do not define you. They will pass.
- Instead of reacting with angry words that might hurt someone, try to respond calmly.
- This can help you to resolve the situation with a more positive outcome.

Mindfulness Discussion

How can you incorporate mindfulness, or mindful prayer into your day, especially in times of strong emotions or stress?



Creating SMART Health Goals

What is one thing you can do to reduce stress?

Create a SMART Plan to achieve your health goals:

- Specific: *What will I do? Where will I do it? How often will I do it?*
- Measurable: *How can I track it? What progress do I want to see?*
- Attainable: *What might get in the way of my plan? What can I do about it?*
- Relevant and Realistic: *Is it a priority for me? If it's not, change my goal.*
- Time-bound: *When will I do it? For how long?*

Next Session: Healthy Eating

- Please join us to learn about how to eat a heart healthy diet!
- I will call you to discuss your health goals, referral needs, and any other questions you might have.