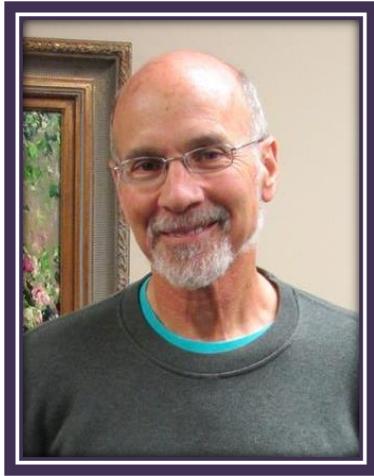


Reducing Stress to Age Well by Stu Jaffe, LCSW



Perhaps you know that stress increases your risk for having a stroke or heart attack, but did you know that chronic stress can also result in wrinkled skin, pre-mature Alzheimer's risk, vision and hearing loss, and the development of unhealthy lifestyle habits?

So how can you reduce your stress? Stress is often a result of factors outside of your control such as family or job responsibilities or the illness of a loved one. However, you can manage your stress to reduce its impact by keeping these daily strategies in mind to care for your body, mind, and spirit.

MOVE

Find a form of exercise that you enjoy. Not sure where to start? If able, walking is always a good place. Try to implement at least ten minutes daily, working up to the recommended guidelines. Remember to consult your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise routine. Once you get moving, you will feel more energetic and less stressed. **Research indicates exercise helps long-term with cognition as well!**

THINK

Consider journal writing to reflect on each day. Try to identify at least three positive moments. Also write of challenging moments. No one has to see it or read it but you, so don't feel pressures of perfect penmanship or proper grammar. **Writing for ourselves helps us cherish and hold the good, notice ways that we may be stuck in negative thoughts, and helps us process and navigate our lives with greater comfort, confidence, and joy.** Consider writing down stories or memories from your life that you will want to share later with your grandchildren. How different are you today than the when those memories occurred?

CONNECT

People need people. Find a trusted person to listen and share. Talking to someone about your stress allows you to release your emotions. You are not asking them to solve your problems, just to be there with you as you face them. Again, research shows that **reducing our isolation improves our health.**

RELEASE

Establish a Meditation Routine. Meditation can help you relax, focus on positive thoughts, and release negative thoughts...and you don't have to fold into the lotus position to do it! Take 15-minutes to start, find a quiet place, and sit comfortably in a straight back chair with your ankles crossed. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply. As thoughts enter your mind, notice them one at a time, and gently let the thought go. Over time you will become more attuned to your thought patterns. Try to nurture your positive thinking, gently releasing negative or self-critical thinking. This practice will help you learn not to pile negative thoughts on top of one another. Recent research has shown that **meditation has special benefits for older adults, including increased longevity, decreased loneliness, and decreased hospitalizations.**

Remember, the hardest part of creating a routine is following through in the first 2 weeks as you develop a new habit. **Pick one strategy to start** and add on as you are able, **finding your way to less stress and better health.**

Look for more details on meditation from Stu in future Counselor's Corner articles, or contact him to talk more about ways to reduce stress at stu@cjfsbham.org or call our office 205.879.3438.