

Managing Pain: On Shifting The Stress Response

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Overview

- Introduction
- Defining Stress
- The Link Between Stress and Pain
- Shifting the Stress Response to Manage Pain
 - A Holistic Approach, Cultivating Resilience, Perception, Mindfulness and Meditation Made Applicable
- The Heart Based Practice: a simple meditation
- Clinical Application and Resources for adults (age 50+)

Introduction

Who Am I?

Acupuncture Physician, Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine, Functional Medicine Practitioner, Founder of Let Go & Grow®

What does my practice look like?

I create evidence based, holistic treatment plans for my patients and then, I partner with them to meet their health goals through building a strong and resilient foundation focused on healthy fundamentals such as mindset, diet and lifestyle medicine.

What will we be up to today?

Today, we will dive into practical tools to shift the stress response for pain management and clinical outcomes- leaving you with practical tools and resources that you can use to explore and implement right away.

What is stress?

Stress: is the total, mind body, response experienced when we perceive that we do not have the resources to handle a life experience. At its core, stress is a disturbance in homeostasis that results in a series of psychological and physiological adaptations. **Evolutionary Mismatch.**

Stressor: while a stressor is the stimulus, or the perceived threat, that in turn triggers the stress response like pain, a final exam, argument or food intolerance.

Level of Stress: simply, our level of stress is determined by what we are given and how we choose to interpret it. It is the interplay between our genetic predisposition, life experiences, perception and choices.

Our Objective

As caregivers and patients, we can provide and try on tools and resources to assist in the shift from a sympathetic, fight-flight-freeze state to a calm, connected parasympathetic state, through building resilience and sending the system a signal of safety- thus, releasing total burden, decreasing inflammation and relieving pain.

By focusing in on the fundamentals and what we can do, we can empower ourselves as we mobilize towards health.



Stress Management through Self-
Regulation: Focusing On What We Can
Do

Multisystem Resilience

In a 2019 study, titled *Multisystem Resiliency as a Predictor of Physical and Psychological Functioning in Older Adults With Chronic Low Back Pain*, University of Florida researchers found that resilient individuals with a more resilient phenotype were linked to lower levels of disability, higher quality of life and psychological functioning, and greater functional performance when compared to those with a lower degree of personal resources.

Shifting the Stress Response

Mindset Training & Working with Emotions

- Awareness of your experiences: the signs, symptoms, benefits, etc.
- Recognizing that you are important and capable
- Intention and commitment
- Engaging change, working through fear
- Perception
 - To you (survival) vs. For you (revival)
 - Division vs. Connection
 - Judgment vs. Observation
 - Resistance vs. Resilience

Shifting the Stress Response

Diet & Hydration

- Eating anti inflammatory, nutrient dense, high quality whole foods that work for your body
 - Foods rich in natural antioxidants (leafy greens, cherries), polyphenols (olive, turmeric), omega 3's (salmon, flax and chia seeds), bioavailable protein and minerals (bone broth)
- Removing the foods that do not
 - Processed, refined and sugary foods
- Drinking at least half your body weight in fluid ounces in clean, filtered water

Shifting the Stress Response

Lifestyle

- Relationships (family, friends), Spirituality, Support & Community
- Environment (Home & Work, organization), Nature, Technology
- Movement, Play, Sleep (7-9 hours), Relaxation
- Restorative Practices (yoga, walking)

Holistic Support

- Professional assistance such as counseling or acupuncture
- Supplementation: Core, Food Based, Therapeutic (curcumin, boswellia, cbd oil, resveratrol), Symptomatic
- Healing Tools: such as at home devices like HeartMath, Fisher Wallace Stimulator, meditation apps like headspace, etc.

What if stress isn't the only problem?

Conventional Approach: “how to be stress free” and “how to fight stress”

To (stuck in victimhood) vs. Neutral vs. For (move forward, seek solutions, find meaning)

Evidence Based Approach: stress is synonymous with meaningful life experiences (think motherhood, public speaking, a big work project or exam)

What if the stress response is just our system's way of rising to the challenge?

What if I could learn to work with my system?

What if it is an opportunity to redirect and to let go of what does not work and optimize what does?

When Perception is the Medicine

In a 2012 study, titled *Does the perception that stress affects health matter? The association with health and mortality*, researchers from Harvard University looked at the link between the belief that stress is bad for you and public death records.

They concluded that both high amounts of stress and the perception that stress impacts health are each associated with poor health and mental health. Individuals who perceived that stress affects their health and reported a large amount of stress had an increased risk of premature death.

Mindfulness, Meditation and Pain

- The terms **meditation** and **mindfulness**, although often coupled or interchangeable in research, are different in that that **mindfulness is a form of meditation but meditation is not a form of mindfulness**
- Mindfulness is unique in that it can be used any time, anywhere by becoming awareness while meditation is typically more broad spectrum referring to many different types of self-reflective practices such as: heart focused, body scan, guided visualization, mantra and breath work and moving meditations
- Both have been studied extensively to shift the stress response and relieve pain through promoting presence, acceptance and resilience, clearing distortion, addressing fear, boosting mood, regulating physiological functions, decreasing inflammation and more-also, promoting healing experiences such as deep appreciation, happiness and creativity

On Meditation

World Within Worlds

Research shows that we can access more expansive experiences within ourselves coming into pronounced **states of coherence** and even entering into **theta and alpha brain states**.

Meditation as Medicine

Meditation is, in essence, medicine, a practice where **neuroplasticity** and a myriad of other health benefits can come forth- studied to relieve pain, regulate digestion, boost mood, and decrease stress, anxiety and depression, and more by taking command of the nervous system.

How to Start a Meditation Practice

Consider Reality

Set a Time

Choose a Practice

Choose a Place

Flexible with Structure

Remember Why You Started

The Heart Based Practice: a simple 3 min. meditation

The Heart Based Practice is the first prescription I give to each and every one of my patients, where we can send the self a signal of safety through the power of the heart, and its ability to rewire the nervous system.

Take 3 min., place both hands over your heart, feel your heartbeat, inhale (5 count) and exhale (5 count) through your heart.

This is a reminder to reconnect to your heartbeat, reset and return home to the present moment, and remember who, what and where you are

Envisioning Health

With age, we may feel the wind leave our sails as we lose hope for a solution and unknowingly deepen into futile choices.

We may also find reverence and deepened appreciation for the gift of life, the choice is ours- and we can choose our perspective at any age.

If we close our eyes, reconnect and return to the present moment, we can envision health and the life affirming choices that can bring us there. Think clean water, nutrients, fresh air, sunlight and internal experience of health and vitality that extends beyond the self.

Clinical Pearls

- One step at a time, shift the tides towards health
- You are more than your experiences
- Empowering others through empowering yourself
 - remembering who, what and where you are
- Keep it simple, Focus on fundamentals
 - chop wood, carry water
- Embracing the healing journey, finding peace within the process and enjoyment with each step



Thank You!