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# Supporting Patients, Families & Nurses in Stress

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*Here, it's different.™*



## Objectives

1

Explore the meaning and role of stress in daily life

2

Discuss the impact of stress on health and wellbeing

3

Identify strategies for managing stress and promoting healthy coping



# What is Stress?

Reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it.  
Jane Wagner



# Sources of Stress

- 1 Environmental: Weather, traffic, noise, etc.
- 2 Social: Demands on time/attention, family dynamics, work obligations
- 3 Physiological: Inadequate sleep, illness, injury, headaches, nutrition
- 4 Thought Process: How you interpret and process present experience and what you predict for the future will either lead to stress or relaxation

***Stress is an essential and unavoidable component of life, and it can be both positive and negative.***



# Symptoms of Stress

## Physical Symptoms:

- Low energy;
- Headaches;
- Upset stomach, including diarrhea, constipation, and nausea;
- Aches, pains, and tense muscles;
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat;
- Insomnia;
- Frequent colds and infections;
- Loss of sexual desire and/or ability.

## Emotional Symptoms:

- Difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts;
- Trouble learning new information;
- Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion;
- Difficulty in making decisions;
- Feeling overloaded or overwhelmed;
- Frequent crying spells or suicidal thoughts;
- Feelings of loneliness or worthlessness;
- Little interest in appearance, punctuality;
- Nervous habits, fidgeting, feet tapping;
- Increased frustration, irritability, edginess;
- Overreaction to petty annoyances.





## Chronic Stress and Disease

- Any problem (real or imagined) can lead to fight/flight/freeze response
- This response is triggered by the release of hormones that prepare your body to either stay and deal with a threat or to run away to safety
- Takes 20-60 minutes post-threat for body to return to pre-arousal state
- In times of chronic stress (one large life stressor or cumulative small stressors without breaks to calm down) body remains hyper aroused
- Chronic stress can inhibit digestion, reproduction, growth, tissue repair, immune and inflammatory responses
- Can accelerate the aging process, particularly in stress-sensitive diseases (cardiovascular, arthritis, cancer, respiratory disorders, and pervasive depression)



**Pandemic stress  
for healthcare  
workers**

*Acute Stress Disorder,  
PTSD, Secondary  
Traumatic Stress*







## Relaxation Response: The alternative to the stress response

- Higher brain functioning;
- Increased immune function;
- Lowered blood pressure;
- Lowered heart rate;
- Increased awareness;
- Increased attention and focus;
- Increased clarity in thinking and perception;
- Lowered anxiety levels;
- Experience of being calm and internally still;
- Experience of feeling connected.





# Body Awareness, Mindfulness, and Stress



# Recognizing Stress: Internal Versus External Awareness

- The ability to recognize how your body reacts to life stressors is a powerful skill
- Stress is unconsciously recognized by the body before it is processed by the mind
- Muscle tension is the body's way of letting you know you are experiencing stress
- Must differentiate external and internal stimuli in order to direct awareness towards stress
- **External Stimuli**: all stimulation from the outside world directed to your 5 senses
- **Internal Stimuli**: any physical sensation, feeling, emotional discomfort, or comfort inside your body



*Body Scanning exercise can bring insight to this experience*

# Mindfulness

“Mindfulness encompasses two key ingredients: awareness and acceptance. Awareness is the knowledge and ability to focus attention on one’s inner processes and experiences, such as the experience of the present moment. Acceptance is the ability to observe and accept—rather than judge or avoid—those streams of thought.”

## *Benefits of practicing mindfulness:*

Decreased stress, worry and anxiety; primarily through improved emotional regulation

Facilitates recovery from trauma and illness while promoting post-traumatic growth

Decreases symptoms of depression and increases self-compassion

Reduces burnout, employee turnover, and improves mental health among healthcare providers



# Emotional Observation: Give feelings a name

- ✓ Simply labeling and naming our feelings can help remove some of the power that they have over us.
- ✓ The act of identifying a feeling helps us to externalize it rather than feeling as though we are defined by the feeling.
- ✓ This process creates space that allows us to be curious about the feeling, observe it, and acknowledge it.
- ✓ By not fighting against the difficult emotion/feeling, we are able to allow it to come and go. We can choose to spend time observing it, or direct our energy and attention to an alternative value.

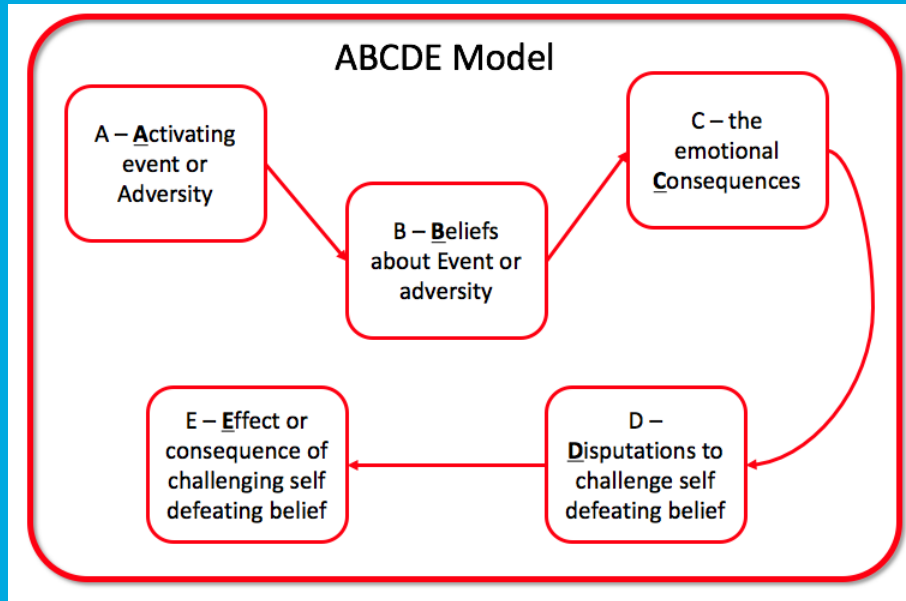


## What Can I Control?

- While things can sometimes seem very out of control, there is always something within our control. Start small!
- Routine, schedule, daily life needs
- Focus on nutrition, movement, rest, and connection
- Ask yourself: What can I control about this experience? How can I choose to see and interpret this?



# Self Talk: Refuting Irrational Ideas



At the root of irrational thinking is the belief that things are done TO you. Nothing is done to you, but rather events happen in the world. You experience those activating events, engage in self talk, and experience an emotion. A does not cause C, B causes C.

- Two common types: “Awfulize” and “Absolutize”



# Promoting Mindfulness and Healthy Coping Through Grounding Techniques





# What is Grounding?

- Grounding is a skill used to connect you with the present- to focus on the here and now.
- Grounding promotes mindfulness through focusing on awareness and interrupting intrusive thoughts and stress responses.
- It can also be used for healthy distraction as needed- both for patients undergoing unpleasant or painful experiences, and for providers needing to separate from emotional experiences.
- Grounding activities are not “one size fits all”- you must practice to find what works best for you. Practicing these skills makes them more easily utilized when needed in stressful times.



# Five Senses Activity

Look around the room and name:

5 things you see

4 things you can touch/feel

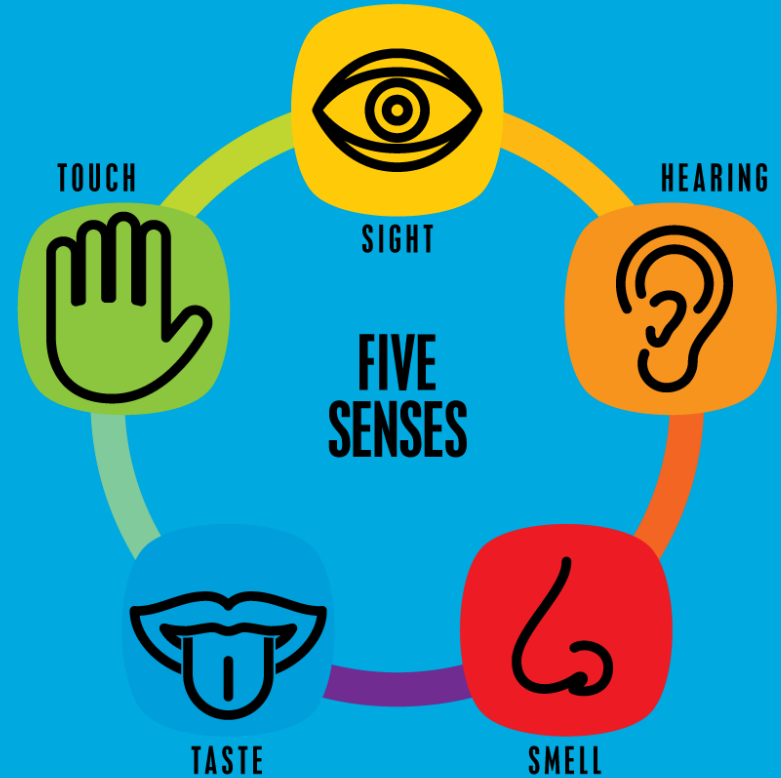
3 things you hear

2 things you smell

1 thing you taste

This can also be used with colors, patterns, or items.

Event without prior discussion/explanation, you can engage your patients in this practice as needed



## What's True Right Now? Exercise

- What is true right now, in this moment?
  - Where are you?
  - Are you safe?
  - Are you hungry? Tired? Cold?
  - What do we know about the current situation so far?
  - What do we have control over?

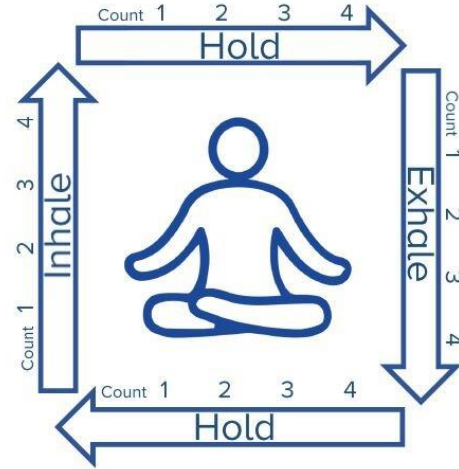


# Square Breathing

Visualize a square as you trace around it for four counts on each side, holding your breath after each inhale and exhale.

Focus on counting each number, seeing the square in your mind, and feeling your lungs expand and contract.

## Square Breathing

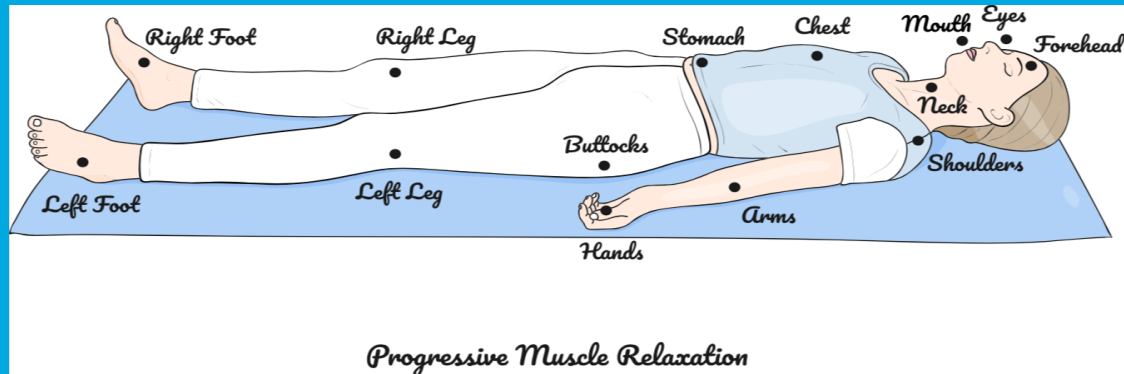


# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Find a quiet, comfortable spot to practice this exercise.

Starting at your toes, tense each muscle and focus on the feeling of tension. Then relax this muscle and move to the next.

Focus on slowing your breathing and feeling the sensations in your body.



**Stress is a necessary and inevitable part of the human experience. Our goal should not be to avoid or eliminate stress completely, but rather to see it as an opportunity for growth. By engaging in intentional observation of our stress, we can begin to promote healthy coping, emotional regulation, and overall improved satisfaction with our lives.**

**Questions?**