

Lifestyle Medicine and Stress Management

Kaylan A. Baban, MD, MPH; Darren P. Morton, PhD

doi: 10.12788/jfp.0285

INTRODUCTION

“Stress” is ubiquitous in modern society, and it has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the report titled *Stress in America 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis*, issued by the American Psychological Association, it was concluded that the United States is in the midst of a stress-related mental health epidemic that could result in serious long-term health consequences.¹ While there are many catalysts of stress, frequently reported sources in the United States include finances, work, relationships, ill-health, and, more recently, existential concerns about the future of the nation and climate change.

to understand better the influence of different forms of exercise on mental health, as well as optimal dosages and durations, individuals suffering from stress should be encouraged to aim for the National Physical Activity Guidelines goal of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on most days.³⁴

SLEEP

As with both diet and exercise, there is a reciprocal relationship between stress and sleep. Notably, health professionals

Known short-term effects of mind-body practices that activate the relaxation response include slowed heart rate, lowered blood pressure, reduced serum cortisol, improved cognitive function, and lower perceived stress.⁵¹ After several weeks of daily practice, mind-body practices have been shown to result in numerous physiologic changes such as lower peak cortisol levels and fewer cortisol spikes,⁵⁵ improved immune function,^{56,57}

evant, and brief mind-body activities can often be integrated into a provider's busy day (eg, walking a hall, speaking with a patient or colleague, performing surgery, etc).⁹³ While the optimal frequency and duration of mind-body practices are yet to be determined, appreciable benefits have been observed with consistent practice of approximately 10 minutes daily,^{94,95} which puts these benefits within the reach of any interested provider.

MULTIMODAL APPROACHES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

This article has explored several evidence-based approaches that can be used to build a versatile stress management "tool-kit." While patient preferences and interests are an important consideration when prescribing stress management options, it is also important to recognize that stress may be best managed through a multimodal approach that incorporates a variety of strategies and practices.⁹⁶⁻⁹⁹ Interventions that have applied a multimodal approach have suggested that a compounding benefit may occur.^{98,99} Hence, introducing a variety of stress management options to patients is recommended.

REFERENCES

1. American Psychological Association. Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis. Published October 2020. Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/sia-mental-health-crisis.pdf>
2. Ornish D, Brown SE, Scherwitz LW, et al. Can lifestyle changes reverse coronary heart disease? The Lifestyle Heart Trial. *Lancet*. 1990;336(8708):129-133.
3. Morton D, Rankin P, Kent L, Dysinger W. The Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP): history, evaluation, and outcomes. *Am J Lifestyle Med*. 2014;10(1):64-73.
4. American College of Lifestyle Medicine. What is Lifestyle Medicine? Accessed September 7, 2021. https://www.lifestylemedicine.org/ACLM/About/What_is_Lifestyle_Medicine/ACLM/About/What_is_Lifestyle_Medicine_/Lifestyle_Medicine.aspx?hkey=26f3eb6b-8294-4a63-83de-35d429c3bb88
5. Tan SY, Yip A. Hans Selye (1907-1982): founder of the stress theory. *Singapore Med J*. 2018;59(4):170-171.

