

Pain Management and Stress

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Who I am:

- Psychotherapist in a pain management clinic in Oakland
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Today's Talk:

- Overview of the relationship between stress and pain
- Some practical ways to use the mind and body to alleviate stress and pain
- Discussion: what has worked for you?

How is Pain Beneficial?

- Calls attention to problem
- Can lead to treatment and healing
- Survival is in favor of those who pay attention to their discomfort
- Over time, nature selected those who paid attention – in other words, those who “stressed” about their pain survived longer, and therefore were more likely to reproduce

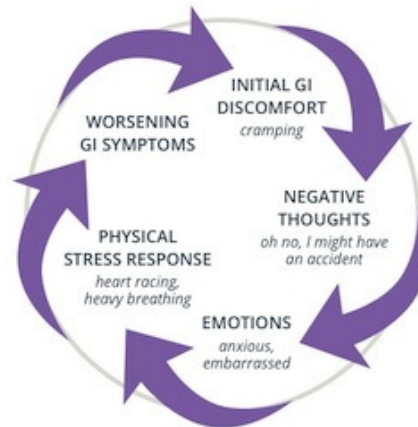
Learning to Communicate with Your Body

- Pain may mean that you need to contact your medical provider
- Pain may be a symptom of your IBD that is not a warning signal that you need medical attention

How Can You Know Which Situation It Is?

- If you are newly diagnosed, you won't know
- In the beginning, it's okay to be "over-concerned;" you are learning
- Track the patterns and clusters of symptoms, including pain levels, over time AND what you need to do when
- The more you understand what the pain "means," the less stressful that pain will be, and less stress = less pain

How Stress Makes Pain Worse



<http://cprgi.org/blog/healthy-thinking-for-digestive-wellness/>

Your Mind on Stress Results In:

- Behavioral Responses “actions”
- Cognitive Responses “thinking”

Behavioral Responses

- “fight, flight or freeze”
- triggers many physiological changes in the body
- heart rate speeds up, respiration increases, blood supply is diverted from the gut to larger muscles to enable the body to fight or flee
- may have a direct impact on gut functioning (the body is focused on more important things than digestion)
- May have an indirect impact on immune functioning and inflammation

Cognitive Responses

- the “story” about what’s going on

Cognitive Distortions that Commonly Exacerbate Stress

- all or nothing thinking: “If I don’t change my diet my symptoms will return.”
- catastrophic thinking: “This feeling means I need surgery.”
- disqualifying the positive: “But I was only able to get a few things done today.”
- “should” statements: “I should be able to handle this better after going to that talk on stress and illness.”

How do you talk to yourself?

- Emotional impact of words: Yes/No exercise
- What are some thoughts you tell yourself about your illness (or the illness of a family member)?
- Might there be some distortion involved?
- Might there be an alternative thought that would be less stressful?

Radical Acceptance

- Alternative to thought substitution
- Based on Buddhist idea that pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional
- Idea is that suffering comes from wanting to change the situation
“this should NOT be happening,” “this MUST stop”
- Relief can come from accepting that pain is part of your reality right now, even though you wish that it was not

Behavioral Interventions

- Breathing
- Pacing
- Warm bath
- Relaxing music
- Enjoyable media
- Phone a friend
- Do some online shopping

Abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing

- turns off the fight or flight
- natural breathing of newborn babies and sleeping adults
- involves slow, deep breaths by relaxing your belly
- this involves using your diaphragm
- the stomach expands as the diaphragm moves downward to allow air to fill the lungs
- Your belly will feel like a balloon expanding and contracting

Important Behavioral Interventions

- Getting past denial: positive thinking is not always compassionate
- Moving towards acceptance of chronic illness
- There are things you can do to prepare

Be Prepared

- Prepare for the unexpected when out of the house: have your “to-go” kit ready in an attractive little bag with change of clothes/wipes, medications, etc.
- Document your “panic plan” - your “go to” phone numbers for people who are supportive, doctors' contact numbers, list of cognitive and behavioral interventions that help the most
- Download: Toiletfinder app

Things to Remember

- Just because an intervention isn't working, it doesn't mean you aren't doing it right
- Different things work at different times
- Sometimes nothing works
- Your feelings are like an elephant, and you are the rider on top of the elephant, so be nice to the elephant