

Grounded in Faith

Another common misconception is that people of faith believe they are immune from hardships. In reality, those that believe they are godly people can be subjected to very negative hardships in their lives. Difficulties are going to both elevate and deepen their faith or it is going to drive them to a place of recognizing that they really didn't trust God as much as they thought they did.

I must often help people of faith embrace a very important principle concerning experiencing negative challenges while in pursuit of a godly life and that is the question of, "Why me?"

I'm reminded of the great literary work of Jewish Rabbi Harold Kushner which states, "Bad things happen to good people." One not being able to embrace this truism in and of itself can create massive stress!

With that said, we need to properly diagnose where a patient is prior to offering recommendations on how to best handle their stress. Because stress is presented in so many ways, it needs to be treated in many different ways. Patients should be viewed as they are — as individuals. Care for stress should be no different than treatment for cancer.

The Individuality of Stress

Just as genomic testing enables us to treat the uniqueness of each individual from a clinical perspective, discovering your history and goals for the future empower us to tailor treatment for your soul as well. We are able to accomplish this through integrative care. As psychiatrists, counselors and pastoral care counselors, we all work with oncologists, surgeons and radiologists to ensure we are treating the person as a whole and giving complete care.

Seven Stress Management Tips

1. Consciously create time and space in your mind and control your physical environment. Through prayer and rest you allow your body and mind to take a breath and pause.
2. Exercise, make smart food choices, take time to catch your breath and get quality sleep to put yourself on the right track. Caregivers can help by coaching and controlling distractions.
3. Anderson said "in addition to lifestyle changes such as exercise and quitting smoking, pharmaceuticals and different naturopathic medicines can help in managing stress such as chamomile, Epsom salts in a bath, using a lavender essential oil or magnesium and things that help the brain relax."
4. "Stress reduction is partially identifying what works for you. Is it walking? It is taking a bath? Is it a punching bag? Is it a bible study? Sometimes you can't shut off those thoughts and worries, and medication is required to get stress under control. It is very individualized," said Sunn.
5. Sunn offered "Go to a bookstore in the stress reduction section and see what books resonate with you. Look for help in an area that is aligned with your core values. If you love music, you will most likely relax listening to music. Find what works for you."
6. Ask for help. No one can or should be expected to go through it alone. Help comes in many forms and from your doctor to your neighbor, to your pastor, most people are just waiting for you to ask.
7. Bless someone else. It can be extremely helpful and energizing to refocus your energy into another person. Maybe it's a card, a phone call, a gift or simply a smile.



For most, the diagnosis itself is the source of the most stress, but maybe your finances took a substantial hit, you care for loved ones or maybe you are just a person who fixes things and you aren't able to fix this.

Regardless of how it is handled, stress is real and it needs to be managed from the very beginning.

"We always address the topic of stress immediately," said Anderson. "The way you view a challenge such as this and the stress you take on can effect tumor growth and spread. Some of it is how you were brought up to handle stress."

Unfortunately, stress also effects more than just the person dealing with it. One of the more poignant examples are individuals who simply stop communicating and sequester themselves in an unhealthy way. Another common example is lashing out in anger against those closest to them — verbally, emotionally and in some cases physical abuse due to the inability to cope with what is causing their stress.

Managing stress in the most effective way takes more than just one person. Loved ones need to step in and, if necessary, intervene to set them on the right path. At the very least, an accountability partner will need to pay close attention to be sure the patient is staying the course and managing their stress in healthy ways.

Our objective in managing stress is to empower the patient to mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically move beyond their current condition of their sickness and illness to hopefully a place of wellness and recovery. That's the goal at the end of the day.

By Rev. Percy McCray Jr.