February aka Heart Health Month

By Jen Muzzi, RDN/LDN, RYT-200, Chef

This month our wellbeing weekly newsletter is focusing on self compassion. I can't think of a better theme for Heart Month! The way you treat your body from the outside in, through diet and exercise, and from the inside out, through the way you speak to yourself and deal with stress, affects us in many ways. It goes hand and hand, emotional and physical; mind and body.

More and more research studies are showing a connection between the mind and body. Here are some examples of worry and fear and the body's response:

Example:
Someone who lives life as a chronic worrier or with chronic stress, may have people saying, “stop worrying! You'll give yourself an ulcer!” While it's been shown that stress doesn't cause ulcers, the way we deal with stress can increase your risk to develop one such as:

- Smoking
- alcohol intake
- avoidance of the cause of stress

Example:
How about a “simple thing” such as nerves, stage fright making your hands shake or causing butterflies in your stomach? Or the sight of needle inducing fainting or the sight of blood causing someone to vomit? Or even cause faux conditions such as with an anxiety attack, where people may think they are having a heart attack or hyperventilating.

If you stop and think about it...... it's pretty amazing that your body works that way, is it not? It's something so intense that you are seeing or feeling, that the mind doesn't know what to do and the body reacts. It's instinct.

There are many scientifically proven research studies that link physical health with mental health. This is known as the “Mind-Body connection”. It's also known that chronic stress leads to increased cortisol levels. Which is causes chronic inflammation, which leads to many chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

The physical: **Obesity** places physical stress on the body, again causing increased cortisol, inflammation.... You get the cycle.

The emotional: **Depression** is linked to chronic inflammation and heart disease

So, what can we do about it?
1. If you have too much on your plate at work or home, tell someone! Ask for help.
2. If you have a higher level of stress at home, work, emotionally or with social issues, then get some physical activity and again, talk or journal about it if you can’t talk to someone.

   Sometimes all you need is to just talk things out. That’s why I’m a big proponent of journaling, seeking out mental health therapists or even a friend you can talk with. Sometimes, all you need it that catharsis and you can feel lighter, therefore decreasing the stress on your body. In my research for this blog, I came across one study that discussed a result where “men with HIV reduced their viral load with the combination of cognitive behavioral therapy [going to a mental health practitioner] and their antiretroviral medications”. (2) That’s HUGE!!!!!! If someone’s emotional state after therapy or a cathartic event can affect HIV, your damn well sure that it can work FOR you with improvement to your physical health!

3. Fuel your body with **healthful foods**. Do not punish yourself with stress eating, excessively drinking or idleness. BUT- do not restrict yourself from certain foods. Enjoy chocolate, sweets, salt, whatever your craving is for, in MODERATION. I mean it! (Refer back to the previous blog about Intuitive Eating techniques.)

   Healthful foods mean those that are limited saturated fat and salt. This leads to a healthier heart and therefore overall health. A healthy individual who has no heart conditions can eat up to 2300 mg of sodium per day. Those with heart conditions should limit it to 2000 mg. For some people, it may be less than that! Make sure you work with your doctor and a dietitian for your best needs.

   This week’s recipe is a lower sodium chicken soup, which is great for the chilly winter weather we have had recently. You can load this soup up with extra vegetables or even switch up the veggies if you like! This makes a good bit, so freeze leftovers or use it as a meal prep for the week. Take time each day for yourself. For the winter weather, snuggle up with a bowl and enjoy the comforts of this soup. 😊

Eat Well, be well, walk your dog and Bon Appetit!
~~ Chef Jen, RDN/LDN, RYT-200

---

**Resources:**

2. [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1456909/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1456909/)
   Accessed 1/27/2021