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WHAT'S HAPPENING

In this issue we take a brief look at a large topic – stress. We will outline what stress is, what it does to the body and give some basic strategies to combat stress.

In past issues we have reviewed some of the in house lab testing performed at Greenwood Wellness Clinic. In the current issue we will briefly outline some of the external lab testing we are able to perform.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

With the New Year upon us, it seems appropriate to comment on the topic of resolutions. We covered this topic in more detail in the Winter 2009 Newsletter, specifically in regards to weight loss. One idea worth sharing related to goal setting, is that of SMART goals. We are more likely to achieve our goals or resolutions if they are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time Oriented

The most common resolutions continue to be related to health or finances. SMART goal setting can be used regardless of the type of goal you have.

At the clinic, we are well equipped to help you with any of your health care goals, from weight loss, better eating or exercise to smoking cessation. A program available at the clinic, which encompasses better eating, exercise and if desired - weight loss, is FirstLine Therapy.

FirstLine Therapy

FirstLine Therapy is a therapeutic lifestyle change, or lifestyle modification, program. The primary goal is helping you achieve and maintain a healthy body composition (lean-muscle-to-fat ratio) to improve health, manage disease, feel better, and reduce your risk to more serious conditions. While not a weight loss program, it is easily adaptable to individual needs to facilitate weight loss. FirstLine Therapy is particularly useful to help with a condition called Metabolic Syndrome, which is really just a grouping of signs including elevated blood sugar, elevated blood pressure, elevated blood fats, along with alterations in body composition.

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STRESS - CONNECTION OF THE MIND AND BODY

Stress is a difficult word to define. Mosby's Dictionary calls it "any emotional, physical, social, economic, or other factor that requires a response or change." The factor that requires the response may also be called the 'stressor' and the response to it may be called the 'stress response.' Perhaps the most important factors in stress and stress responses are our beliefs, thoughts and experiences surrounding the situations we are in. Put simply, stress is different for everyone – what is a stressful event for one person may not be for another, and this is dependent on our thoughts and experiences.

Stress is generally thought of as a negative thing. However the father of modern stress research, Hans Selye MD, argued that stress itself should not be viewed in a negative context. "Stress is not even necessarily bad for you; it is also the spice of life, for any emotion, any activity causes stress. But, of course, your system must be prepared to take it."

In certain situations stress causes our bodies to adapt favourably. Exercise, for example is a 'stress'. Our body is forced to increase our heart rate in response to increased activity. This causes our heart to be stronger and healthier the next time that same stress is encountered. Stress becomes a negative thing when the stress response is 'maladaptive.' Either we are responding to incorrect stressors or we are in situations where our body is not able to maintain the stress response – chronic stress.

Determining if Stress is a Problem

The possible effects of chronic stress are nearly endless. It can aggravate nearly any pre-existing condition and also be the primary cause of many physical symptoms. A partial list of signs of stress includes:

- Anxiety
- Back pain

- Constipation or diarrhea
- Depression
- Feeling tired
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Shortness of breath
- Stiff neck
- Trouble sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Weight gain or loss

Often a patient will already know stress is an issue. 'My headaches are worse when I'm stressed'. 'I get sick more when I'm stressed.' Sometimes your naturopath may help you determine that stress is likely playing an adverse role in your health. A questionnaire may be used to try and quantify stress and its effects; in some cases testing may be performed to look for signs of 'resistance' or 'exhaustion'.

Stress Management

Since stress can never be completely eliminated, we talk of ways to manage stress – reducing stressful situations, changing our perceptions of stressful situations and learning tools to help our bodies respond to stress better.

Before getting to ways to manage stress, we should be aware of some of the negative management strategies many of us use in response to stress. These strategies only serve to weaken the system further. A short list might include:

- Chemical dependence (i.e. alcohol, caffeine, smoking)
- Overeating
- Too much TV
- Feelings of helplessness
- Overspending
- Emotional outbursts

Often the first step to reducing the negative impact stress can have in our lives is to identify what events are causing stress. It

is often easy to name a few stressors, but we can become so accustomed to dealing with some stressors that they become part of our 'normal' lives.

Next is to devise a strategy to reduce the frequency and or severity of the stress response to the event. This may mean avoiding traffic at a certain time of day, or perhaps a more radical change, like a new job. Reducing the stress response can be more difficult. Sometimes it may mean changing our beliefs about a situation (e.g. a phobia to heights or public speaking), or learning new skills such as meditation, deep breathing or progressive relaxation.

As with most health problems, great benefits can be realized with physical activity and generally healthy eating. Regular exercise can diminish feelings of fatigue,

depression, tension and worries. In prolonged situations of stress, supplementation may also be beneficial, as chronic stress can deplete the body of specific nutrients. In some cases supplementation may be warranted to replace these specific vitamins and minerals. All naturopathic modalities may be beneficial in certain cases, including botanical medicine, homeopathy and acupuncture. However, it is important to note that this may not be removing the ultimate cause of the stress or abnormal response.

Targeted relaxation is also very important in stress management. Some people benefit from meditation, yoga or similar techniques. One simple breathing exercise is outlined below.

Breathing Exercise - Complete Breath

Proper breathing is slow, deep and rhythmic. Deep means that the initial movement is from the abdomen. When you breathe, the movement starts in the low abdomen and then moves up to the chest. To check your breathing, put one hand on your low abdomen and one on your chest and take a deep breath. What do you notice? If your chest rises up first you are probably using your neck muscles to breathe, not your main breathing muscle – the diaphragm.

Technique:

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position or in a chair.
2. Straighten your back, which will straighten your thorax for easier breathing.
3. Inhale slowly through the nose, breathing deeply, consciously looking upward.
4. Take five seconds to fill the lower lungs, expanding the ribs and pushing the abdomen out.
5. Hold the breath for 1-5 seconds.
6. Exhale slowly until you have emptied the lungs, looking downward.
7. Repeat 4-5 times more.
8. For stress management it is recommended that you practice the complete breath technique 1-3x/day, for about 3 months, or as recommended by your Naturopathic Doctor.

Tips for maximum benefit:

- Establish a rhythmic rise and fall of your abdomen, to promote regular breathing.
- Attempt to breathe inaudibly after you have gotten the knack of deep breathing.
- Concentrate on your breathing alone, without other distractions - with your eyes closed, if you wish.
- Push your abdomen out as you breathe in and pull the abdomen in as you breathe out.
- Give an extra push as you exhale to rid yourself of air in the bottom of the lungs.
- DO NOT slump. For maximum efficiency the upper body must be straight.

TESTING AVAILABLE AT GREENWOOD WELLNESS CLINIC

A dialogue between doctor and patients, with a brief physical exam, is often enough to arrive at an accurate diagnosis. Certain situations, however, call for a more thorough examination. Because we are all unique, individualized testing may help to diagnose and specify the best treatment options. At Greenwood Wellness Clinic we have access to many state of the art tests to help determine the underlying cause of illness and the best course of treatment.

In house testing

Several tests, which have been highlighted in greater detail in past newsletters, can be performed and analyzed in our office. This

allows for immediate results and interpretation. Tests available include:

- *Live Blood Analysis*
- *Biological Terrain Assessment (BTA)*
- *Bioimpedance Analysis (BIA)*
- *Standard Urinalysis*

External Lab Testing

External labs are also used for many tests. In the majority of cases samples can be collected or dropped off at the clinic. Depending on the test, results may be obtained within 2 days and 2-3 weeks. Prices for these tests vary greatly, and are in addition to consultation fees. Some tests include:

TEST	DESCRIPTION	WHEN TO USE
<i>Standard blood tests</i>	Most standard blood tests available in Ontario can be performed by your Naturopathic Doctor	Useful in nearly all cases for screening or specific diagnoses
<i>Saliva testing</i>	Excellent for detecting hormone imbalances as well as examining adrenal gland function	Menstrual irregularities, stress/adrenal fatigue
<i>Comprehensive stool analysis</i>	Examines a full range of yeast, bacteria and parasites as well as digestive markers	Digestive problems, IBS, inflammatory bowel disease, suspected infections
<i>Food allergy/sensitivity testing</i>	A simple blood test that measures the body's immune reaction to 96+ foods	Digestive problems, allergy symptoms (joint pain, headaches, skin rashes etc.)
<i>Toxic metal analysis</i>	This may be performed through blood, urine or hair analysis	Toxicity symptoms (fatigue, headache etc.)
<i>Organic Acid Test</i>	A urine test that can reveal information about bacterial and fungal infections, neurotransmitters, vitamin and mineral deficiencies	Suspected candida, certain deficiency symptoms, ADHD, chronic fatigue/fibromyalgia
<i>Microbial testing</i>	Available for a variety of bacteria including Lyme disease	If a chronic infection is a potential cause of symptoms

****If you no longer wish to receive our newsletter or you prefer to receive an electronic version, please contact the office. Thanks.****

Note: The information provided in this newsletter is not intended to treat or diagnose any condition. Please see your health care provider before beginning any new treatment.