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Psychology 1010

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Stress and Health Semester Project

Introduction

The stress and health semester project is the evaluation of stress that I have in my life and to explore new, possibly more effective ways of managing my own stress. The overall goal is to help evaluate what causes my stress, to look at how I have been managing my stress, and to see what I can do differently in the future to make myself feel better mentally and physically.

Brief Summary of the New Methods

I focused on a total of three methods to see if they could help manage stress in my life. From previous knowledge about reducing stress, I already know that these three methods can help to reduce stress in an individual's life. I believe that they all work and connect together to reduce stress, as well as, create a healthier lifestyle.

The first method that I had chosen to help reduce my stress was to start exercising consistently. I do exercise here and there, but I feel like it's not consistent enough to make a difference in my life. For the most part, I have noticed that exercising in a consistent manner has helped reduce some of the stress that occurs in my life.

The second method was yoga and meditation. I had taken multiple yoga classes before and have enjoyed all of them every single time I went. However, the yoga classes that I had attended were going towards a class credit, so it wasn't something that I did on my own personal

time. Since becoming aware of my love towards yoga and meditation, I have decided to start implementing it into my life. I have only seen positive changes since starting yoga and meditation, I can say this method is a great way to get rid of stress.

The last method was the most challenging, which was trying to implement more healthier food in my everyday diet. I feel like I go through phases where I have a healthy balanced diet, and other times, I have a bad habit of snacking on junk food. Since trying to be more aware of what I'm eating, I have experienced a decrease in stress, as well as, some moments of an increase in stress.

Reflection of the Experience

Between the three methods, I feel like exercising and another method was the most beneficial for managing my stress. If I'm in a bad mood that day, such as feeling irritable, angry, or even anxious, I put all of my energy into the workout and challenge myself. I usually feel more relaxed and happier after I've been active, it's almost like a weight has been lifted off of my shoulders. Even if I'm in a good mood when I start my workout, I feel accomplished, even more happier and energized after I finish. Majority of the time, I exercise around evening to night time. The next day, I noticed a major difference; I'm more motivated to get my tasks done, I have been more productive, I get up earlier, I'm happier and I'm energized. From my experience, I would continue to make an effort to exercise consistently.

However, there was the benefit of reduced stress from exercising, there can also be a negative effect. There were certain days that I have noticed that I was low on energy and my body felt tired. That gave me the indication that I needed to take a step back and let my body have a rest day. Pushing my body to keep going and to be active all the time isn't realistic. Even

though it's healthy for the body to be active, it's not healthy for the body to be overworked without any rest days.

Besides from the exercising method, the yoga and meditation method was another great source to get rid of my stress or to reduce it. I have not experienced any negative stress when managing this strategy into my everyday life. When doing yoga and the meditation along with it, I could feel all of the stress leave my body. What really helped was that calm and relaxing music, I feel like the music is an extremely important component when doing yoga and meditation. After each session, I felt as complete ease, unwinded and relaxed as I could ever be. I would without a doubt continue to do yoga and meditation when I'm feeling stress. I would even recommend this stress relieving strategy to family and friends because I honestly believe that it's that good at reducing stress.

The eating healthier method was by far the most challenging method out of the three that I chose. In my opinion, it was almost a love-hate relationship. I had started to limit my intake of snacking on junk food and replacing it with food that was more nutritious for my body. To me the results were extremely apparent. My body didn't feel tired and sick anymore, as it would if I snack on a large amount of junk food. It almost felt like my body was a lot more happier with me and the changes I was making. Since I've been continuing to implement more of a healthier food into my diet, I have felt more energized, active, motivated and less stressed. I would still continue this strategy to help minimize my stress because I have seen a positive shift in my mood.

Overall, I have learned that eating healthier is a fantastic way of keeping the body healthy and energized. However, I have learned that becoming restrictive on every single thing that I ate

is not healthy. It can actually be extremely damaging to the body and to the mental state of the mind. It's completely acceptable to eat that unhealthy food every once in a while, but not everyday. There have been some challenges that I had to overcome since trying this new strategy, which has caused me a small amount of stress. Again, I would continue this method but I would continue to make changes to have a better experience.

Strategies That Relate to Course Material

Regular physical activity can improve that quality of an individual's life and relieve stress, tension, anxiety, and depression (“Working Out to Relieve Stress.”). Exercising can also increase an individual's overall health and their sense of well being. Any form of exercise can act as a stress reliever, even a small act of an exercise can go a long way towards stress management. Physical activity increases the production of the brain's good neurotransmitters, which are known as endorphins. Regular exercise can help relax an individual, as well as, lower symptoms that are associated with mild depression and anxiety (“Exercise and Stress: Get Moving to Manage Stress.”).

Aerobic exercises can allow positive changes to an individual's body, metabolism, heart, and spirits (Harvard Health Publishing). The main concept of this exercise is to increase heart rate and oxygen intake for a sustained period of time. This allows the increase of production of neurotransmitters, such as; endorphins and serotonin, which reduces stress and improves happiness (Chapter 14 PowerPoint).

Yoga is a mind and body practice, it brings together physical and mental disciplines that can help achieve peacefulness of the body and mind. Breathing is an important component in yoga. Controlling the breath can help control the body and quiet the mind. In yoga, it is often that

meditation and relaxation will be incorporated. Meditation allows an individual to learn to be more mindful and aware of the present moment without judgment. There are multiple health benefits, such as; stress reduction, improved fitness, and management of chronic conditions (“Yoga: Fight Stress and Find Serenity.”).

Relaxation can be accomplished through yoga and meditation. It is the technique of reducing tension by consciously relaxing muscles in an individual's body. Relaxation can reduce symptoms of stress, as well as, cortisol levels. It helps to lower brain activity, the heart rate, breathing, and reduces muscle tension (Chapter 14 PowerPoint). All of these factors that contribute to relaxation mimics the parasympathetic nervous system. The main concept of the parasympathetic nervous system is to return the body to normal resting state, it is mainly the opposite of the sympathetic nervous system (King).

It is important for everyone to eat wisely. Stress can tempt an individual to overindulge, and that is due to cortisol (Chapter 14 PowerPoint). One of the therapeutic modalities mentioned that in stress management is to adopt a nutritious diet. A proper diet can counterbalance the negative impact of stress by strengthening an individual's immune system, stabilizing moods, and reducing blood pressure. There are a few important nutrients that help with stress reduction. Those nutrients consist of; vitamin C, complex carbohydrates, magnesium, and omega 3 fatty acids (UCLA Center for East-West Medicine).

Herbal supplements and teas could also be used for a calming effect, as well as, to reduce stress related insomnia, anxiety, or even anger. A few products that could help are; chamomile, mint, barley tea, passionflower, and valerian root. However, it is noted for safety reasons to

consult a health practitioner before using any new herbs or supplements (UCLA Center for East-West Medicine).

Conclusion

Remembering that everyone deals with stress differently and how we deal with it is a choice. It is often many times that an individual will handle stress in a negative way. It is important to keep in mind that we have to control the stress by adopting a more healthier lifestyle which can include many different things (“Campus Health's Role Is to Support Individual and Campus Health Needs during COVID-19.”). This project has allowed me to reset and think about how to reduce and eliminate stress in a positive and healthier manner.

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