Optimal Psychosocial Health

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Objectives

- Describe the effects of positive and negative attitudes on health
- Describe the effects of social engagement on health
- Describe positive sexuality and aging
- Describe the role of spirituality and health
- Describe the effects of stress on health
- Describe the effect of depression and grief on health

Chicken and egg question
Attitudes and Health

- Consistent link in research between positive attitudes &/or emotions and health
  - Fewer risk factors
  - Fewer negative events (e.g., heart attacks)
  - Faster or more complete recovery from events

- The experience of “gratitude” or “appreciation” is particularly linked to well-being

Gratitude

- “The habitual focusing on and appreciating the positive aspects of life.”

- Strongly linked to positive outcomes
  - Positive emotional functioning
  - Positive social functioning
  - Less anger & hostility
  - Less depression
  - Higher success in life activities

Wood AM, Clin Psych review, 2010
Gratitude Interventions

- PTSD – low gratitude scores
  - If gratitude practice is used – better functioning

- Sleep
  - Better sleep latency, duration & quality

- Simple interventions:
  - Write down 3 things you are grateful for at bedtime
  - Tell someone one time a day something you are grateful for
Social Engagement

- Clear connection between social engagement and:
  - Development of depression
  - High social engagement scores in all centenarian studies
  - Lower rates of dementia
  - May be as important as exercise

- “The necessity of being necessary” (W. Bortz)
Social Activities and Health

- 13 yr study of 3000 people over age 65
- Tracked 14 activities – exercise, social, daily chores
- Regular social activities (volunteer, getting together with friends, playing bridge) fared as well as those exercising
  - Stronger factor in survival than exercise, blood pressure, and cholesterol

Social Activities and Dementia

- Long term prospective study of 4000 Japanese American men in Hawaii
- 5 measures: marital status, living arrangements, group activities, social events, close friends
  - Highest scores developed less dementia
  - The greater the decline the greater the dementia
Physiologic Connections

- Improved brain repair mechanisms
- Lower cortisol levels
- Lower atherosclerosis
- Improved immune responses
  - Increased lymphocyte killer cell activity
- Better glucose metabolism

Saczynski JA. Amer J Epidemiol 2006; 163:433-440
Marriage and Health

- Strongly correlated with better outcomes
  - Unmarried women – 50% increased mortality
  - Unmarried men – 250% increased mortality
  - Probably related to # of social connections

- Positive effects related to a positive marriage (duh!)
  - Negative marriage not only negates the positive effect, it accentuates risks

Kiecolt-Glasser, Psychological Bulletin 2011, 127:472-503
Low Marital Quality Studies

- Increased periodontal disease
- Increased heart disease
- Increased behavior problems in dementia
- Increased pain and pain-related disability
- Increased blood pressure
- Many, many more adverse effects
High Marital Quality Studies

- 100s of studies show better health outcomes when patient is in a healthy marriage (compared to single people)
- Crosses multiple conditions (heart, arthritis, neurological conditions, etc.)
- Effect is stronger on men than women
- Smaller number of studies showing couples who work on relationship improve health
Sexuality

- 70% of men sexually active at 68, but 25% at 78
- Survey of 80 to 102 year olds – 63% of men and 30% of women sexually active
- Key issue is partners – at 80 there are 39 men for every 100 women
- Sexual desire and intimacy remains high in spite of medical conditions
Does Sexuality Promote Health?

- Chicken and egg question
- 1997 Welsh study – men who had 2 or more orgasms a week had half the risk of various cancers
- Duke – intercourse (for men) and enjoyment of sex (for women) was linked to longevity
- Masturbation in women as effective as vaginal estrogens
Male Sexuality

- Testosterone decreases with age
- Taking testosterone increases risk of heart disease, hair loss, and accelerates prostate cancer
- Regular, short, intense bursts of exercise raises testosterone
- Decreased rate of erectile dysfunction in regular exercisers
Women’s Sexuality

- **Most common reason for decreased activity is partner problems**
  - Lack of, physical health, lack of interest

- **Most common change is dryness of the vagina**
  - Regular sexual activity is best treatment
  - Extended foreplay
  - Water-soluble lubricants
  - May need short term hormone treatment
Questions

- Use of Viagra and similar medications
  - Male
  - Female?

- Use of herbal products – no clear evidence

- Risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI)
Depression and Grief

- Grief and bereavement are normal states
  - No evidence they are helped by medications
  - Some evidence that medications interferes with resolution
  - Loss of a spouse if the highest on stress scales
- In an older person, grief after a significant loss can last a long time, and be severe
- Even dramatic symptoms are still normal
  - “Hallucinations” of the loved one being present
Passing Through Grief

- Consciously acknowledge the depth of your feelings (no judgment)
- Talk to others, especially to good listeners
- Watch for warning signs – appetite loss, isolation, intrusive thoughts
- Remember the positive (effect of positive thoughts on brain function)
- Exercise
Depression

- A medical problem
- Often experienced differently by older people
  - More “non-emotional” symptoms – appetite loss, memory problems, sleeplessness
  - May be written off by providers
  - May not be admitted by patients (“weakness”)
- Responsive to multiple types of interventions
Depressions

- Symptoms
  - Loss of interests, sleeplessness, appetite loss, concentration loss, lack of energy, hopelessness, feeling down
  - Suicide is the greatest risk

- Three equally effective treatments
  - Cognitive-behavioral therapy
  - Exercise
  - Medications
Depression Medication Treatment

- Treat until person feels better – then 9 more months
- Attempt slow withdrawal from medication
- If another episode develops – 2 years of treatment
  - The attempt withdrawal again
- If another episode occurs – lifelong treatment may be necessary
Holmes- Rahe Stress Scale

- Death of spouse (100)
- Divorce (73)
- Separation (65)
- Imprisonment (63)
- Death of a close family member (63)
- Personal illness or injury (53)
- Marriage (50)
- Fired from work (47)
- Retirement (45)
- Marital reconciliation (45)
- Change in health of a family member (44)
- Change in financial status (38)
- Death of a close friend (37)
Reducing the Effects of Stress

- Progressive relaxation
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Meditation
- Prayer
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction
- HeartMath
The Stress Zone

- Stress is almost always an emotional reaction to a situation.
- Stress impacts your ability to think clearly, respond appropriately and perform at your best.
- Your stress level directly impacts how you feel at the end of the day, your health and your relationships.
Warning signs

- Loss of focus and mental clarity
- Lack of ability to relax and sleep
- Loss of self esteem
- Feeling tired and on edge
- Struggle to motivate yourself and others
Emotional Memories
Emotional Perceptions

Sensory Cortex

Thalamus

Amygdala

FAST TRACK

Activation of ANS and Stress Hormones

Emotional Memories

Trigger Memories

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Autonomic Nervous System

**Sympathetic Pathway—Accelerator**
- High Effort
- Adrenaline

**Parasympathetic Pathway—Brake**
- Low Effort/relaxation
- Acetylcholine
Hormonal System

Cortisol  DHEA
High Cortisol:Low DHEA

- Impaired memory and learning (Kerr et al., 1991; Sapolsky, 1992)
- Decreased bone density; increased osteoporosis (Manolagas, 1979)
- Reduced muscle mass (Beme, 1993)
- Reduced skin growth and regeneration (Beme, 1993)
- Impaired immune function (Hiemke, 1994)
- Increased blood sugar (DeFeo, 1989)
- Increased fat accumulation around waist / hips (Marin, 1992)

Chronic stress=excess cortisol=accelerated aging.
Your Emotional Landscape

High Arousal

High Energy
Adrenaline

Low Arousal

Low Energy
Relaxation

Stress Zone

Stress Free Zone

Positive Emotion

Negative Emotion
Benefits of Physiological Coherence

- Reduced blood pressure in hypertension (McCraty, 2001)
- Increased functional capacity in CHF patients (Luskin, 2002)
- Improvements in asthma (Lehrer, 2000)
- Increased calmness and well-being (Friedman, 2000)
- Increased emotional stability (McCraty, 2001)
- Improved cognitive performance (McCraty, 2001)
Heart Rate Variability (HRV)
Changing Heart Rhythms

![Heart Rate Graphs](image-url)
The Power of Positive Emotions

- Increased longevity \( (\text{Danner et al., 2001}) \)
- Reduced morbidity \( (\text{Goldman et al., 1996; Russek & Schwartz, 1997}) \)
- Increased cognitive flexibility \( (\text{Ashby et al., 1999}) \)
- Improved memory \( (\text{Isen et al., 1978}) \)
- Improved decision making \( (\text{Carnevale & Isen, 1986}) \)
- Increased creativity and innovative problem solving \( (\text{Isen et al., 1987}) \)
- Improved job performance & achievement \( (\text{Wright & Staw, 1994; Staw et al., 1994}) \)
- Improved clinical problem solving \( (\text{Estrada et al., 1997}) \)
Quick Coherence® Technique

- Heart focus
- Heart breathing
- Heart feeling
emWave® Technology