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Timely Information for Personal Success

Physician Talks on Stress Surprisingly Rare

By Rachael Rettner

Although stress is common among people with health problems, few primary care doctors take time to discuss ways to reduce stress with their patients, a new study suggests.

The results show just 3% of visits to primary care doctors include discussions of stress reduction, the researchers said. That's much lower than the 60% to 80% of doctor's visits *thought* to involve stress-related health problems, the researchers added.

Stress counseling was also less common in the study than nutrition counseling, which occurred in about 17% of visits, physical activity counseling, which occurred in 12% of visits, and weight counseling, which occurred in about 6% of visits.

"The low rate of [stress] counseling points to potential missed opportunities, suggesting that physician counseling about stress has not been incorporated into primary care to the extent of other types of counseling," the researchers wrote in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Primary care doctors, already crunched for time during office visits, may feel they simply can't fit in a discussion about stress management, the researchers said. Indeed, office visits in the study that *did* involve such discussions were longer.

Changing primary care so that patients are treated by teams of doctors could address this issue, said study researcher Dr. Aditi Nerurkar, a primary care physician at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. Physicians could partner with nurses and other health care providers who could counsel patients on stress, Nerurkar said.

Stress and Disease

Studies have linked stress to high blood pressure levels, heart disease and heart attacks. While stress does not necessarily cause these conditions, it may exacerbate them, Nerurkar said. Stress may also make diabetes harder to control, and affect how people perceive chronic pain.

Nerurkar and colleagues analyzed information from more than 34,000 visits to 1,263 physicians between 2006 and 2009. They looked to see whether the office visits included information on ways to reduce stress, such as through exercise or yoga, or if doctors referred their patients to a specialist to discuss stress reduction.

A little more than 1,000 of the visits included stress management counseling. Patients were more likely to be counseled for stress if they were experiencing a flare-up of a chronic condition, or if they had depression.

This suggests doctors are not *preventing* stress-related complications, but rather, counseling patients *after* the fact, the researchers said. ■

Rachael Rettner writes for MyHealthNewsDaily. Additional source: EAP NewsBrief, a service of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA).

CLIP-N-SAVE! www.eatingwell.com

Healthy Recipe: Chocolate Fondue

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon brewed espresso (or instant espresso powder)
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 banana, peeled and cut into 8 pieces
- 8 one-inch chunks fresh pineapple
- 4 strawberries

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 345
- Carbohydrates: 54 g.
- Protein: 4 g.
- Sodium: 81 mg.
- Fat: 19 g.
- Saturated fat: 10 g.
- Fiber: 7 g.

DIRECTIONS:

❶ Place chocolate, cream, espresso and vanilla in a medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave on "Medium," stirring every 20 seconds, until melted, 1 to 2 minutes.

❷ Pour chocolate mixture into serving bowl. Serve with the fruit.

Tips: Use fondue forks or bamboo skewers. If you don't have an espresso maker, look for instant espresso powder at your supermarket.

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Questions and Answers

If You're Sick, Stay Home!

Q: *Why is it so important to stay home when you're sick? I'm too busy at the office to take off from work.*

A: A lot of people worry that skipping work will make them look lazy – and might even put their job at risk. But officials with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say that showing up sick is a bad move all around. First, you risk infecting the entire office. Anytime you cough or sneeze, anyone within 6 feet of you can catch your cold or flu germs. Besides, when your co-workers get sick who do you think they'll blame? It's not a great way to earn your colleagues' trust and support.

Even if you think going to work while you hack, sneeze, and sniffle makes you a super trooper, you'll be a super "ineffective" trooper. One recent study found that productivity dramatically drops when you're sick, simply because it takes you roughly twice as long to focus on tasks.

The next time you're sick, call or email your boss explaining that you can't come in. If your presence is crucial, offer to be available by Skype or email. Finally, don't go back to work until your symptoms are gone for at least 24 hours – that's when you're no longer contagious. ■

Additional source: John Tesh: Intelligence for Your Life (www.tesh.com).

DSM-V: The Future of Autism Diagnosis

Publication of the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) will mark one of the most anticipated events in the mental health field. *DSM-5* is scheduled for release in **May 2013**. The following is but one of the highlights:

❖ **Autism spectrum disorder** (ASD) – This would be a new category, which would incorporate several previously separate diagnoses, including autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.

The proposal asserts that symptoms of these four disorders represent a continuum from mild to severe, rather than a simple yes or no diagnosis for a specific disorder. The proposed diagnostic criteria for ASD specify a range of severity as well as describe the individuals' overall development status – in social communication and other relevant cognitive and motor behaviors.

This change will help clinicians more accurately diagnose people with relevant symptoms and behaviors by recognizing the differences from person to person, rather than providing general labels that tend to not be consistently applied across different clinics and centers.

For updates and for more information about the DSM-5 development process, visit: http://www.dsm5.org/Pages/Default.aspx.

The American Psychiatric Association received more than 13,000 comments and over 12,000 emails and letters during the three open-comment periods, which began in 2010. ■