Have the longer days and arrival of spring ignited in you a desire for renewal and revitalization? If so, your spirit has been awakened by a very ancient tradition. The preparation for new beginnings, purification and the celebration of spring’s arrival is a customary tradition known simply as “spring cleaning”. And while customs vary across cultures, decluttering our physical spaces, also presents an opportunity for addressing the internal clutter that accumulates over time. Is this a modern twist? I’m not quite sure. I do know however, that decluttering our physical space also helps to declutter the mind, allowing for more focus and clarity. And, one crucial aspect of internal spring cleaning is the management of stress leading to the restoration of hormonal balance, which can significantly impact overall well-being.

Stress is our body’s natural response to the demands and pressures we face daily. It’s an inevitable part of life. While too much stress can be harmful to both our physical and mental well-being, a certain amount of stress is actually beneficial. Just like a pinch of salt in a dish enhances its flavor, a healthy amount of stress can motivate us, sharpen our focus, and drive us to achieve our goals. The key lies in finding the right balance.

Stress permeates our lives in various forms, from work pressures to personal relationships, and self-imposed and societal expectations. While some stress can be motivating and beneficial, chronic stress is detrimental to our physical and mental health. It triggers the release of hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, preparing the body for the “fight or flight” response. However, prolonged activation of these stress hormones can lead to a range of issues, including anxiety, depression, digestive problems, and impaired immune function.

Consider a day where we may have hit the snooze button too many times, wake up tired, rush to get ourselves (and possibly everyone else) out the door on time, skip breakfast, and supersize a caffeine and sugar laden drink on our way to the office to feel energized enough to power through the next 8-10 hours. If that is something that happens occasionally, no problem, especially when we have the right tools to get right back on track. When this is the norm however, we are headed for trouble. Very often the very “remedies” we reach for in an attempt to increase energy and mental clarity are not only masking symptoms, they are also proven to *increase* stress and anxiety.

The Cleveland Clinic lists caffeine and high sugar foods among those that can actually increase cortisol, the hormone responsible for driving stress. Consuming high levels of caffeine found in coffee, tea, and energy drinks can increase feelings of anxiety and stress. Sugary foods, soda (including diet soda) and refined carbohydrates can cause blood sugar spikes and crashes, leading to mood swings and increased stress. Excessive consumption of processed and fried foods can contribute to inflammation in the body, which has also been linked to increased stress levels and impaired gut health, causing digestive issues. Sadly, these foods and drinks are also regularly consumed by tweens and teens adding to the already high levels of stress and anxiety among this age group.

Adapting a balanced and nutritious diet while minimizing intake of processed foods and stimulants can help manage stress effectively. Better choices can encourage mental clarity, more energy, better sleep, hormonal balance, and stabilize blood sugar. Is it simple? Yes. Is it easy? Not always. But is it possible? Yes again! How we deal with stress matters.

In addition to choosing wisely when it comes to fueling our bodies, healthy coping mechanisms such as exercise, meditation, seeking support from friends and family, or engaging in hobbies can help us to effectively manage stress. Identifying the cause is also a helpful tool. Rather than masking it, allow yourself a few minutes of quiet time to peel back the layers each day until the root cause is obvious. Maybe you know the cause and it’s not something you can change. In that case perhaps you can make some adjustments to the way you respond to it.

Viewing stress as a normal part of life’s journey rather than a catastrophe can significantly impact our response. Embracing a positive mindset can turn challenges into opportunities for growth. By practicing healthy stress management techniques, you’ll develop greater resilience – the ability to bounce back from adversity stronger than before. Taking care of your physical, emotional, and mental health leads to overall well-being. You’ll feel more energized, focused, and perhaps even more optimistic about facing life’s challenges.

*April is National Stress Awareness Month. If stress becomes overwhelming or starts affecting your daily life, seek professional help. A therapist or counselor can provide valuable support and coping strategies.*

For a free copy of “A Recipe for Healthy Stress”, reach out at joann@wellnessfusion.net. Remember this monthly article is here for you, For the Health of it!

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