



Sandoval County Senior Program Administration

CENTER LOCATION

APRIL 2021

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Sandoval County Senior Program
1500 Idalia Rd., Bldg. D
P O Box 40
Bernalillo NM 87004

Phone: 867-7535
Fax: 867-7606

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Monday—Friday 8-5pm

Sponsorship

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ADMINISTRATION STAFF

Senior Program Administrator
Janice Mortensen

Administrative Assistant
Jennifer Stivers

Food Service Manager
Donald Ravizza

Accounting Specialist
Elaine Jaramillo

Transportation Drivers
Thomas Alderete (**Scheduler-Driver**)
Shannon Cassidy (**Driver**)
Tony Gonzales (**Driver**)

SAMS Data Coordinator
Megan Siegfried

All Sites individualize their newsletters to their local area information, activities calendars and games.

Health & Wellness

Stress Awareness Month April 2021: What You Need to Know

What Is Stress Awareness Month?

Sponsored by The Health Resource Network (HRN), National Stress Awareness Month is an annual campaign that began back in 1992 and has taken place every April since.

During this month, health care professionals unite to raise awareness of what effects stress has on people's everyday wellness, and what can be done to combat it. Public forums, discussion groups, and other informative community events are employed to shed more light on the health impacts of stress.

What Can You Do During Stress Awareness Month?

Share Your Story

If you experience stress or anxiety, April could be a good time to share your story, perhaps via social media. Mental health issues have been considered taboo for far too long, but this is changing, and you can help to change it too.

Seek Professional Support

If you think that stress is harming your health, but you've been putting off doing anything about it, now could be a good time to seek some support. Talk to your doctor and (if necessary) let them refer you to the right professional for the right care.

Reach Out to Your Social Circle

Regardless of whether you want to share your story with the whole world, and even if you seek (and get) professional support, there's no time like the present to engage with your close social circle. As the old saying goes, "a problem shared is a problem halved."

Perfect Your Personal Coping Mechanisms

We're all unique and, as individuals, we all cope with stressful situations in different ways. If you've suffered from stress before, you may already know what you need to do to take the edge off your stress responses. Now could be the time to perfect your personal coping mechanisms, perhaps by getting ideas from other people and sharing your stress-reduction techniques with them

Be Kind!

Kindness seems to be something more people are talking about in regards to stress. It costs nothing but could make a huge difference in people's lives. By being kind to each other in April and every month before and after that we could reduce stress all round. This can only be a good thing.

Health & Wellness continued

How Does Stress Impact Your Health?

Stress can affect you physically as well as mentally, so let's look at some of the physical manifestations of failing to effectively manage your stress.

Stress and Your Heart

Having a healthy heart should always be a top priority. The American Heart Association says that more research is needed to determine the part that stress plays in your heart health. However, experts agree that periods of stress can lead to behaviors that increase the risk of developing heart disease. Maybe you eat more, drink more alcohol, or smoke more when you're stressed. None of these things are good for your cardiovascular health.

Stress and Your Digestion

Do you know that your gut is lined with more than 100 million neurons, meaning that in a sense it has its own brain? So if stress can affect the mental health of your main brain, maybe it can affect your digestive mental health too. According to Harvard Health, psychological stress can cause ongoing digestive problems, such as constipation or (at the other end of the scale) diarrhea. If you experience such symptoms for no obvious reason, you should see a doctor sooner rather than later to see if the cause could be psychological rather than physiological.

Stress and Your Weight

One of the most visible ways that stress can affect your health is through weight gain. Research published in the Biological Psychiatry Journal suggests that everyday stressors can cause your body to metabolize substances slower, which means you burn fewer calories throughout the day.

According to the National Health Service, obesity and even simply being overweight have been linked to a myriad of health concerns, including type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, certain kinds of cancers, and strokes. To avoid these things, there is one clear course of action: look for the signs of stress and start taking the steps to control it.

What Are The Signs of Stress?

We all experience some form of stress from time to time. Mental and physical problems arise when this occasional "acute" stress turns into long-term "chronic" stress. Learning to spot the signs of stress could help you keep it in check. According to the Mental Health Foundation, we should be looking out for the following signs of stress:

Physical Changes

Some of the physical manifestations of stress are headaches, sickness, and indigestion. You may also experience weight loss or gain.

Health & Wellness continued

While all these things could be symptomatic of something else, it could be worth consulting with a doctor if you experience a combination of these physical changes.

Mental Changes

Stress will impact your mental state. You could find yourself becoming irritable, inflexible, short-tempered, or snapping at people. Stress can also be linked to a lack of sleep and (subsequently) difficulty concentrating. Seek some help if this becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Emotional Changes

Similar to the mental changes, stress can wreak havoc with your emotional state, and you could start feeling anxious, fearful, frustrated, angry, or sad for no apparent reason. Search for some professional answers if your feelings lead you to be oversensitive and emotional.

Behavioral Changes

Out-of-control emotions can lead to unusual behavior, such as becoming overly reliant on substances such as caffeine, alcohol, or other drugs. Changes to your appetite and sleep patterns could also indicate an issue. Be aware of how you usually or used to behave, and ask for advice if anyone tells you you're not acting like "you."

3 Simple Tips for Reducing Stress

Keep a Journal: It can help to write things down. So, if you're experiencing a broad range of emotions and struggling to cope, buy a notebook to try journaling. Research from the University of Rochester suggests that spending ten minutes per day jotting down how you feel can help lower stress, relieve anxiety, and allow you to better cope with depression.

Exercise: Don't discount the power of exercise. Physical activity causes your body to produce powerful endorphins. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, these hormones can help you sleep and (in turn) lower your stress levels. Whether hitting the gym or simply walking to work, try to incorporate regular exercise into your daily life.

Talk to Your Friends: When you're stressed out, it can feel as though the whole world is against you, which is certainly not the case. Take the time to express how you feel to the people around you. Opening up about your struggles might mean you get some extra social support, clarity on the situation, and advice from the people who matter the most.

Health & Wellness continued

The Final Takeaway

If you experience stress in your own life like most of us do or you know other people who are stressed, you should take the time to make a positive change. This could include getting involved with events or simply talking to those around you about this important subject. Stress Awareness Month is an opportunity to start some serious conversations about stress, but you shouldn't stop talking about it when April has come and gone.

New Mexico Crisis and Access Line. Call toll free anytime 24/7/365 1-855-662-7474

Nutrition

Managing Stress and Emotional Eating During COVID-19

During these times of uncertainty with the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be feeling stressed, bored, lonely, sad, afraid or anxious. These emotions can lead us to eat when we're not really hungry. This is called emotional eating.

Stress can affect your appetite

Emotional eating differs from occasionally using food as a reward or remedy. Instead, eating food becomes a primary coping mechanism to deal with emotions. It can be hard to know when hunger is physical or emotional.

Stress is also strongly linked to emotional eating. Short-term stress can reduce appetite. On the other hand, continued stress increases cortisol levels in our body. Cortisol is a hormone and when the body releases it in response to stress, this can increase appetite and the motivation to eat.

Generally, people with prolonged stress turn to foods high in sugar and fat. Eating these kinds of foods activates dopamine, the "reward" neurotransmitter. Foods high in sugar and fat make you feel better in the moment and they are referred to as "comfort foods" because they appear to counteract stress.

Here are some tips for managing stress and emotional eating:

1. Be aware that your eating patterns might change

During times of stress, there are three possibilities regarding your food intake: it might increase, decrease or stay the same. Listen to your body and be alert to your hunger and satiety cues. Satiety is when you feel full from food. Make sure you're eating healthy foods full of nutrients and drinking plenty of water. Try to avoid skipping meals, as it makes you more prone to emotional eating and binge eating.

Nutrition continued

2. Self-reflect on your eating

Be curious about your eating choices and situations. Do you find yourself eating more or craving specific kinds of foods when you feel a certain way? Does eating more or having these kinds of food make you feel better or worse? Keep in mind that rather than being negative and self-critical, these questions are meant for you to understand your emotions and choices better. Keeping a food log, or an “emotional” food log or journal, can help you become more aware of your food choices.

3. Be present

A great strategy to better connect with your hunger and satiety cues is to practice a technique called mindful eating. To eat mindfully, remove distractions (namely screens, like TVs, cell phones and laptops), avoid eating directly from the package and focus on the sensorial properties (smell, taste, texture) of the foods. Learn more about tips for mindful eating.

4. Monitor your overall health

Ask yourself: Am I managing my stress in a healthy way? Am I engaging in physical activity that makes me happy? Am I doing other activities that relax me or make me happy? It’s always important to reach out to loved ones and/or health care professionals if feelings of stress persist.

5. Get enough sleep

Research has found that getting too little sleep is related to both over-eating and an increased desire for energy-dense (high calorie) foods. Although sleep needs may vary from person to person, most healthy adults need between 7 to 9 hours of sleep daily. Some ways to improve your sleep are: establish a regular sleep schedule, avoid caffeine and electronics use before bedtime and reduce irregular or long naps during the day.

6. Try to keep a daily routine

Routines should incorporate sleep, exercise, safe methods of socializing and meals. Having regular times for meals and snacks may help some people avoid mindless trips to the kitchen.

7. Practice self-compassion

Feeling guilty, shameful or angry towards yourself can continue the emotional eating cycle. Remember: the best gift you can give yourself is love and acceptance. Know that you are not alone, as we’re all going through difficult times. And if you need further help, don’t hesitate to reach out to health professionals. Many professionals are offering virtual visits while restrictions on in-person interactions are in place.

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Staying Active

Foot and Leg Health

Put Your Best Foot Forward

Good foot health is especially important for senior citizens, as three out of four people develop serious foot problems as they age. Maintaining good foot care is a solid step to enjoying your senior years on the go. Consider these helpful tips to keep your feet healthy:

- Bathe your feet daily with warm water and blot dry; never rub. And don't soak them longer than 10 minutes or the skin will get dry and start to crack.
- Massage your feet with cocoa butter or a lanolin cream to help the skin retain moisture and stay soft.
- Check your feet every day. Take a few minutes to look for cuts, blisters, bruises, sores, infected toenails or swelling. Use a small mirror if bending over is a problem, or ask someone for help.
- Wear a clean pair of socks every day to help keep your feet dry.
- Wear comfortable shoes, and rest your feet whenever possible by elevating them above your heart level.
- Exercise carefully but often; walking is one of the best forms of exercise.
- Have an annual foot exam.

For Improved Health, Get A Leg Up

Leg exercises are also a vital part of senior fitness. Here are several leg exercises that can be done at home, without any special equipment. Speak with your doctor before doing these exercises if you have a balance disturbance or are concerned about whether it is safe for you to do them.

Ankle Circles. While either seated or standing, hold onto the back of a solid chair. Lift one leg off the floor and rotate the ankle in a circular movement five times, then stop and repeat the motion in the opposite direction. Put your foot back on the floor and then repeat with the other ankle. This exercise improves ankle flexibility and is an effective warm-up exercise for lower legs.

Calf Raises. Place a phone book or other thick item on the floor to stand on. Hold on to the back of a heavy chair for balance, step on the book, raise your heels off the ground and hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times. Reposition your feet so that only the front of your foot is on the book and allow your heels to drop so that you feel a stretch in your calf muscles. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times. Calf exercises strengthen your legs and give you more stepping power.

Staying Active continued

Squats. Sit in a chair and push yourself into a standing position using only your legs. Lower yourself back down into the chair smoothly without dropping. Inhale on the way down and exhale as you push up. This works your thighs and buttocks. As your legs strengthen, abandon the chair and stand with your feet under your hips and bend at the knees and hips to squat towards the floor in a controlled manner and then push yourself back to the starting position. Repeat five to ten times.

Walking. As with foot care, walking also exercises your leg muscles. Wear comfortable shoes and walk in a safe environment, preferably with a companion. Aim to walk for at least 10 minutes a day initially with goals for gradual increases, ultimately building to 30 minutes a day at a brisk pace.

Our bones are healthy, living tissue that changes over time. While we can all expect to lose bone mass over time, there are things we can do to slow the progression. Exercise, proper nutrition, certain medications and regular check-ups can help seniors stay on their feet as they age.

