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1-2015

Stress Less

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Recommended Citation

Craig, Winston J., "Stress Less" (2015). *Lake Union Herald*. 41.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/41>

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Massage improves stress-related insomnia and lowers blood pressure.

Massage improves post-surgical recovery.

Stress Less

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Are you awaiting some new health breakthrough this year? Maybe some new drug, or a new high-tech surgical procedure? Maybe a new expensive fitness program to help you lose weight quickly? Think again. Maybe the most powerful determinants of your health and well-being are, in the words of Dean Ornish, “the lifestyle choices you make every day: to eat well, stress less, move more, and love more.”¹

Furthermore, Dean, who is president of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in California, says that “Changing your lifestyle can change hundreds of genes in only three months — turning on genes that promote health, and turning off genes that lead to heart disease and cancer.”² His research has shown that low-tech, low-cost lifestyle interventions have reversed the progression of heart disease, early-stage prostate cancer, and type 2 diabetes. He claims that diet and lifestyle modifications can, in most cases, override genetics if you’re willing to make big enough changes.

As we look to the year ahead, let’s take a closer look at one of the four lifestyle factors Dean mentions: how to manage stress more effectively. About 20–30 minutes of quiet meditation on God’s Word each day can help lower stress levels. Laughter also can lower stress and increase the flow of endorphins. Thirty minutes of brisk physical activity each day can work magic on high stress levels. Turning off your smartphone three to four hours each day helps you lower stress, by helping you catch your breath from the flood of text messages and influx of emails that come your way.

Massage is another easy way to beat stress. In a recent survey, over one-third of responding hospitals said they offered complementary medicine therapies, with massage being one of the top two services provided.

Massage takes many forms but usually involves rubbing, pressing or manipulating soft tissues of the body. Massage is used widely to reduce stress and anxiety, relieve pain, relax muscles, improve circulation, and promote healing and



relaxation. Massage can assist the body to release endorphins and serotonin (natural painkillers and mood regulators). Massage also reduces the level of cortisol, a stress hormone, and raises the production of lymphocytes. Massage eases joint pain and improves impaired joint mobility. Massage also can improve stress-related insomnia and reduce blood pressure.

People with cancer report reduced pain and anxiety, and less nausea and other side effects,

by over 40 percent, when they received massage treatments. People with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) experienced an increase in their natural killer cell numbers. Millions of Americans suffer from back pain, neck pain, migraines; massage helps relieve such ailments. Surgical patients who are given massage often feel better and require less pain medication during surgical recovery. This explains why many hospitals have incorporated massage therapy into their post-surgical treatment.

A massage also can help to improve blood circulation and relieve muscle soreness following an injury. In a study at Mayo Clinic, staff who received chair massages experienced stress reduction and enjoyed greater job satisfaction. One caution: Massage should be performed by a knowledgeable person since a person can be hurt if massage is not performed correctly.

Winston J. Craig, Ph.D., RD, lives in Walla Walla, Washington. He is a professor emeritus of nutrition of Andrews University.

1. “Your Body: Unlocking the Secrets to a Long & Healthy Life,” *Newsweek Special Issue*. Topix Media Lab: New York, NY (Jan. 1, 2014).
2. *Ibid.*