

The Second Pillar of Prevention- Stress Management

In this series I am sharing the Four Pillars of Alzheimer's Prevention, and like diet, this second pillar addresses a root cause of many of our chronic health issues. Despite the active search for a pharmacological treatment for Alzheimer's, little progress has been made. The ARPF (www.alzheimersprevention.org/4pillarsofprevention) even challenges the leading hypothesis that plaque formation is a cause rather than a symptom of the disease. They cite a leading neurologist who recently told *Bloomberg News*, "There is mounting evidence that removing amyloid is closing the barn door after the cows have left." For now, I stand with them in supporting an integrative lifestyle approach to prevention and delay.

Studies point to oxidative stress as the major insult to tissue throughout the body, and high on the list of triggers is the stress hormone cortisol. While most Lathrop residents have weathered the high stress periods of life, old habits of thought and feeling, mixed with the steady drumbeat of current events may continue to put strain on body systems and cognition. The recent Harvard Health Newsletter identifies the relaxation response as the opposite of the body's stress response and a downward effect on blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, and stress hormone levels. "It does even more than that: when you elicit the relaxation response, you secrete beneficial hormones and reduce the activity of harmful genes," says Dr. Darshan Mehta, medical director of the Harvard-affiliated Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital.

The modern medical paradigm often falls back on a drug based approach. The wellness approach is about daily practices. There are many paths to learning how to evoke the relaxation response including mindfulness meditation, tai chi, yoga, and the following methods, all of which can be explored in as little as 7minutes/day.

Focused breathing. Focusing on slow, deep breaths can be calming. Make sure your belly moves in and out as you breathe. (some find simple counting helpful)

A body scan. Concentrate on one part of the body. Imagine it is open, warm, and relaxed, and that you are releasing tension from that area. Move on to another body part and repeat the process.

Guided imagery. Create a soothing scene in your mind that makes you feel relaxed. It may be a place or an experience. Allow your senses to be involved, imagining the smells you are encountering, the sounds you are hearing, and the ways things feel in your hands.

Repetitive prayer. Repeat a favorite prayer from your faith either silently or out loud. You can use a guide (such as your breathing or a rosary) to help with the repetition.

The ARPF has done several studies of the effectiveness of the yoga based kirya-kirtan meditation using a pattern of verbal and silent tones. I'm happy to share instructions on this technique. Do you have a practice that helps you evoke the relaxation response? There are numerous residents I've met with a regular practice and our area is full of groups and teachers of meditation. There is a group who meets weekly in Easthampton. I would be happy to work with you individually or in small groups to help make

this bit of prevention active in your daily life. It starts with acceptance; there's no magic bullet, just good practices.

-Rob Olmsted, RN