

SMART about Resiliency and Recovery

Resilience can be thought of as our inner strength that allows all of us to respond and recover from adversity. Resilience can enhance healing and help us thrive physically, emotionally, socially, mentally and spiritually.

S- Start with learning how basic lifestyle practices promote “EASE”

E EAT healthy

- Healthy foods provide us with the energy needed to stay active and the nutrients needed to buffer and recover from stress.
- Eating slowly allows us to tune into cues from our body that we are full, preventing overeating.
- Eating in a calm manner and with awareness improves digestion, absorption of nutrients, promotes relaxation and can enhance enjoyment of meals.

A Stay **ACTIVE- Exercise and physical activity:**

- buffers our body's reaction to stress and enhances recovery from stress
- releases muscle tension promoting relaxation
- boosts mood through the release of brain chemicals and better sleep
- enhances memory and ability to plan which can increase confidence and success in meeting goals
- Stretching, gentle yoga and Tai Chi/Qi Gong emphasize focusing on breath while moving or holding poses. These practices can promote muscle relaxation, concentration, coordination, balance and improved energy.

S SLEEP well. Sleep:

- of 7-8 hours is essential for optimal body and brain health
- boosts mood, energy and motivation to exercise, and attend social activities
- affects hormones involved in regulating appetite
- enhances memory, learning new skills (physical and mental) and athletic performance
- deprivation increases risk of medical problems such as obesity, diabetes, depression, anxiety
- can be enhanced by sleep hygiene which is attention to caffeine, alcohol, physical environment etc

E Every day engage in mind-body relaxation. While participating in The MGH Cardiac Rehabilitation Program you will be taught several easy to learn relaxation-meditation practices that elicit the relaxation response and you will be given resources for guided relaxation using YouTube on your phone or computer/tablet.

M- Mind-body practices are techniques designed to enhance the mind's positive impact on our bodies. Studies have provided evidence regarding health benefits of engaging in ancient based practices such as relaxation, meditation, prayer, yoga and Tai Chi/QiGong. **Mindfulness** is at the heart of many mind-body practices. It describes the intentional, purposeful shifting of our awareness to experiences in the present moment. When we practice mindfulness, we train our minds and "hearts" to cultivate attitudes of compassion, curiosity, openness and acceptance. The quality of mindfulness can be brought to any activity or experience such as while eating, relaxing, meditating, doing Tai Chi, journaling, working in the garden or even doing the dishes. Mindfulness is key to developing compassionate self awareness as we examine the situations in which we experience stress or difficult emotions and see what we do in response to those situations. We then gain insight into what we may do out of habit and perhaps is no longer beneficial.

A-Adaptive Perspectives reflect positive **attitudes** that have been found in studies to be essential for developing and enhancing resiliency and buffering one from the effects of stress. Here are 2 examples.

The "4 Cs" based on the work of Suzanne Kobassa

- Control: Believing choices one makes influences outcomes of events
- Challenge: Viewing difficult circumstances as challenges instead of threats
- Committed: Feeling dedicated to what must do to recover
- Closeness (added by H. Benson MD): Feeling supported and socially connected

The "5 Ls" based on work by Barrie Greiff

- Learn: Having an openness to new experiences
- Labor: Working at something satisfying and meaningful
- Love: Giving, receiving, caring, cherishing
- Laugh: no explanation needed!
- Letting Go: Letting go of "shoulds", expanding flexibility, coming to acceptance (when ready)

Awareness of our attitudes and beliefs and the thoughts from which they develop from are a key part of resiliency training. Under stress we tend to engage in negative self talk fueled by automatic negative thoughts. Automatic negative thoughts (ANTS) occur almost instantly like a "knee -jerk" reaction. Examples of ANTS are: "I'll never get it right", "This always happens to me", "things will never change" and "###\$%&*#@&%!". Words that are clues for ANTS are: Always, Ought, Never, and Should. At the root of Automatic Negative Thoughts are 3 basic beliefs:

- I am incapable (inadequate, incompetent, powerless, out of control)
- I am worthless (unworthy, bad, useless)
- I am not lovable (likeable, cherished)

Practice recognizing automatic negative thoughts and challenging the above core beliefs. Provide yourself with the calm, compassionate care you give to a friend or others when you see they are upset/suffering.

R- Recovery from heart disease or any traumatic event is a process that involves recovering a confident self and identity that can integrate the changes that have occurred. This may include:

- Acknowledging and dealing with new feelings of vulnerability
- Grieving the loss of a former more “care-free” self
- Reevaluation of one’s priorities, values and goals
- Re-defining relationships with others

Understanding typical stages of Loss and Recovery may help you make sense of your experiences since being diagnosed with heart disease or a recent hospitalization. Here is a brief description of the stages.

- An **event** such as having a heart attack or stent
- **Denial, shock, surprise, disbelief** (“This can’t be happening”, “Why me?” “Why now?”)
- **Anger, fear, blame, disappointment in self and others** (“Why didn’t my doctor see the happening?”, “If it wasn’t for my stupid job I wouldn’t be in this mess”)
- **Bargaining, anxiety, lack of control, uncertainty** (“I will never eat red meat again”, “If I always exercise, I shouldn’t have to ever deal with this”)
- **Depression, sadness, despair, loneliness** (“My life is over.”, “Why should I even try?”)
- **Acceptance, adjusting belief system, values, re-defining identity** (“I can learn how to make healthy eating choices, “I can make changes “)

People move in and out of all the stages multiple times and in different order. Illness can affect individuals, families and friends. People close to you may also be going through stages of loss at different times than you. This sometimes contributes to difficulties in relationships as loved ones may be doing or saying things, well intended but not helpful to you.

T-Turning to others for support or receiving support is not always easy but studies show that social support can decrease stress and complications from heart disease.

Personalize your “go -to” list of ways to reduce stress, increase relaxation and promote well-being. Put a check by ones you use regularly. Circle one you are ready to learn more about or use.

E Eating healthy

- ☐ Choosing healthy foods
- ☐ Eating slowly
- ☐ Eating without distractions
- ☐ Other: _____

A Staying Active

- ☐ Daily walking
- ☐ Dancing
- ☐ Gardening
- ☐ Stretching
- ☐ Strength training
- ☐ Tai Chi
- ☐ Yoga
- ☐ Other: _____

S Sleeping well

- ☐ Planning for 7-8 hours of sleep
- ☐ Avoiding pm caffeine
- ☐ Relaxing for 20 mins or more before going to bed
- ☐ Eliminating electronic light/making room dark
- ☐ Other: _____

E Engaging mind & heart

- ☐ Humor ☐ Meditation ☐ Aromatherapy
- ☐ Music ☐ Journaling ☐ Prayer ☐ Reading
- ☐ Finding inspiration
- ☐ Hobby of _____
- ☐ Connecting to nature by: _____
- ☐ Contemplation/reflection
- ☐ Enhancing gratitude
- ☐ Enhancing communication skills
- ☐ Enhancing or expanding social connections (people/pets) by _____
- ☐ Enhancing time management skills by _____
- ☐ Taking time to reflect and “put a positive spin” on difficult situations
- ☐ Practicing replacing automatic negative thoughts with positive ones
- ☐ Practicing self-nurturing by _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Review this with staff at your next exercise session.