

Complementary techniques beneficial for reducing stress

June 1 2012, By Katie Pence

(Medical Xpress) -- We've all said it; those two words that sum up a bad day or an unexpected expense: I'm stressed.

A little bit of time-limited stress is all right, but research has shown that chronic stress can take a toll on your health, meaning exhaustion and a weaker immune system.

Sian Cotton, PhD, research associate professor in the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Family and Community Medicine who studies complementary and integrative medicine practices, says that research points to evidence that complementary medicine practices can help with daily stress as well as help people cope with chronic conditions.

"It is not so much the stress in our lives that causes the problem, but our reaction to that stress," she says, adding that stress can cause an individual to cope in unhealthy ways, like smoking, developing unhealthy eating patterns or drinking too much alcohol, and can raise blood pressure or other mechanisms in the body that send the system into "fight" mode.

"However, even a few regular moments during one's day of meditation, deep breathing, walking or simple stretching exercises are healthy and effective ways to lower stress."

Cotton has conducted a number of studies to show how complementary

medicine techniques and spirituality can help patients cope with asthma and other chronic conditions.

"Our findings have shown that many chronically ill adolescents use complementary methods to help manage their disease and often find them helpful," says Cotton, noting that oftentimes with chronic conditions come high levels of emotional and mental stress.

"Those patients who are using complementary medicine techniques have shown to have improved health outcomes. Other studies have shown how these same techniques can improve stress levels and overall well-being for general populations, leading to an overall happier healthier life."

Cotton suggests any sort of quiet, mindful technique to reduce stress—for patients, families and health care providers.

"Quiet meditation or prayer, deep breathing, yoga or another form of mind-body or relaxation strategy that you enjoy, coupled with a healthy lifestyle are all benefits in keeping your [stress](#) levels at a lower level," she says. "If a stressful problem becomes chronic or overwhelming, see your primary care or mental health care provider, but overall, for day-to-day life stressors, make time to relax in any form you choose—and stick to it.

"It may not seem important, but studies consistently show a link between a healthy mind, body and spirit."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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