

Techniques for Coping with a Chronic Illness

(Tips useful for all humans!)

MUSC IOP 2024 Fall Social Work Conference

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Disclosures

I do not have any known or potential
conflicts of interest

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to describe what happens in the body when an internal or external stress is perceived.
2. Participants will be able to demonstrate 3 exercises to tone down the volume of these stress responses.
3. Participants will receive information on free Apps, support groups, tips and tricks, and video links for sharing with clients or for their personal use to help cope with daily life.

Chronic Illness: Stressful!

Life is hard; it's made even harder by the discomfort and uncertainty of a chronic illness.

Our body's natural stress response:

- Psychological responses

- Endocrine responses

- Physiological responses

The negative impact of chronic stress

Today we will practice several exercises to turn down the volume of our bodies' natural stress response, and increase coping

Kristofferzon, M.-L., Engström, M., & Nilsson, A. (2018). Coping mediates the relationship between sense of coherence and mental quality of life in patients with chronic illness: a cross-sectional study. *Quality of life research*, 27(7), 1855–1863. Cham: Springer.

Self Compassion, Stress and Coping

Studies have implied that when a person with a chronic illness perceives that they have effective coping strategies that work, they describe having an improved Quality of Life.

“Self compassion has been defined as a positive self-view that involves relating to oneself with kindness and acceptance in times of failure and difficulty. A growing body of research has documented that self-compassion is linked to lower levels of perceived stress, and increased resilience in the face of stressful situations, including chronic illness.”

[Bing Videos](#) (link) Kristin Neff, How to practice self-compassion, 2:00 minutes

Now, let try it...

Sirois, F. M., Molnar, D. S., & Hirsch, J. K. (2015). Self-Compassion, Stress, and Coping in the Context of Chronic Illness. *Self and identity*, 14(3), 334–347. Hove: Routledge.

Fight, Flight, or Freeze Response

Served us well in the past

Modern Life – most threats are not physical

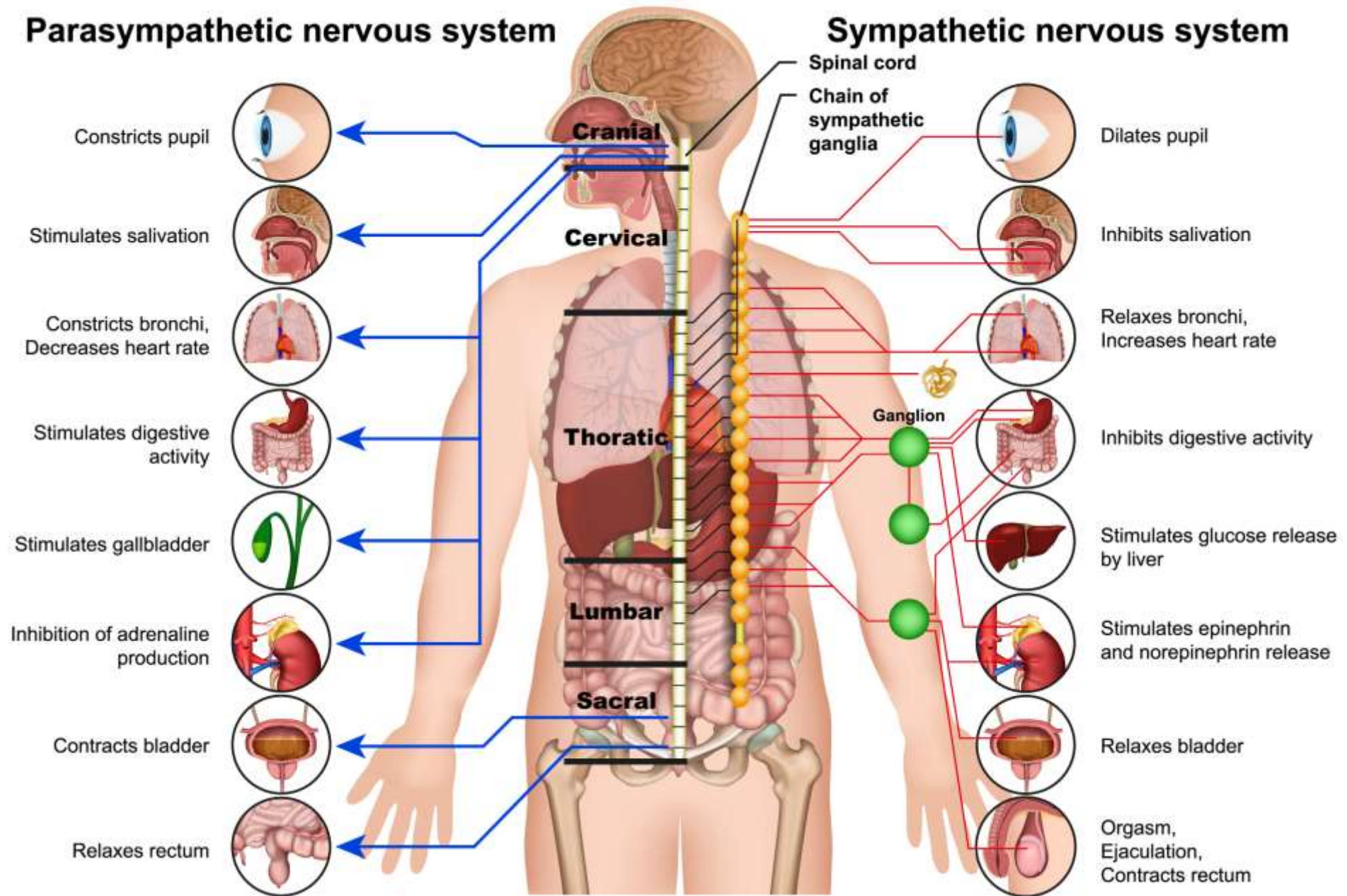
Despite not needing to respond physically to threats, our bodies are just programmed to respond with the Sympathetic Nervous System to be prepared to “Fight, Flight, or Freeze”

The Parasympathetic Nervous System controls the “Rest and Digest” bodily functions

We can **decrease** the effects of our Sympathetic Nervous System by **activating** our Parasympathetic Nervous System to slow our heart and breathing rates, lower blood pressure, promote digestion and reduce effects of stress hormone cortisol.

Parasympathetic nervous system

Sympathetic nervous system



Biologydictionary.net Editors. (2021, February 20). Sympathetic vs. Parasympathetic Nervous System. Retrieved from <https://biologydictionary.net/sympathetic-vs-parasympathetic-nervous-system/>

Methods to Activate the Parasympathetic Response

[Diaphragmatic Breathing | UCLA Integrative Digestive Health and Wellness Program – YouTube](#)

Time: 7:30

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClqPtWzozXs>

Johns Hopkins Rheumatology, Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise

Time: 5:53

Mindful, Breathing, Hypnosis Apps – FREE!

[UCLA Mindful - Mindfulness Education Center | UCLA Health \(link\)](#)

UCLA Mindful - free app in 19 languages, including American Sign Language.

[Try Our Free App for Guided, Mindful Meditation | Healthy Minds Innovations \(link\)](#)

Healthy Minds, no ads, funded by donors,

[The Johns Hopkins Mindfulness Program | Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences \(link\)](#)

Guided Meditations and Breathing Practices

[Smiling Mind \(link\)](#)

Australian app, free, child and school based

[Comfort Talk® Pro App - Comfort Talk \(link\)](#)

Self hypnosis recordings - help patients manage the apprehension and pain associated with medical visits and procedures, using mind's natural ability to reduce stress and bolster self-confidence without the use of medication.

The Power is in the Exhale

2022 Research study at Stanford University:

Three different daily 5-min breathwork exercises compared with an equivalent period of mindfulness meditation over 1 month. The breathing conditions are:

- (1) cyclic sighing, which emphasizes prolonged exhalations
- (2) box breathing, which is equal duration of inhalations, breath retentions, and exhalations - 4-4-4-4
- (3) cyclic hyperventilation with retention, with longer inhalations and shorter exhalations.

Cyclic Breathing correlated with **improvement in mood and anxiety** as well as **reduced physiological arousal (respiratory rate, heart rate, and heart rate variability)**. Using a mixed-effects model, we show that breathwork, especially the exhale-focused cyclic sighing, produces greater improvement in mood ($p < 0.05$) and reduction in respiratory rate ($p < 0.05$) compared with mindfulness meditation.

<https://youtu.be/IBJ2z4PxVt0> Dr. David Spiegel demonstrates Cyclic Sighing, Time: 3:47

Balban MY, Neri E, Kogon MM, Weed L, Nouriani B, Jo B, Holl G, Zeitzer JM, Spiegel D, Huberman AD. Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal. Cell Rep Med. 2023 Jan 17;4(1):100895. doi: 10.1016/j.xcrm.2022.100895. Epub 2023 Jan 10. PMID: 36630953; PMCID: PMC9873947.

More Resources (links)

[We Can't Wait: Restroom Finder App | Crohn's & Colitis Foundation](#)

[What States Offer Paid Family Leave for Caregivers? AARP](#)

[S.C. Office of Economic Opportunity \(sc.gov\) weatherization](#)

[Senior Benefits: Find Help Paying for Everyday Needs | BenefitsCheckUp](#) national tool for seniors or folks with disabilities, put in your zip code

[Commodity Supplemental Food Program \(CSFP\) - SC \(benefitscheckup.org\)](#)

[Ways to Get Cash Assistance - Assistance-Guides.com](#)

[www.GetCareSC.com](#) for Caregivers and Seniors, but some can apply to any age.

SC Homestead Exemption, no tax first 50K of fair market value, for 65 y.o. and up, disabled or blind, surviving spouse can keep it if 50 y.o

More Resources

[Charleston Water System](#), if you get homestead exemption for your property taxes, the \$11 storm water fee charged to everyone with this water provider is waived. You have to apply for it.

[CARTA OnDemand – CARTA \(link\)](#) Uber and Lyft rides for 55 y.o. and older. CARTA OnDemand will connect riders going to or from destinations within the fixed-route area, **Monday through Friday from 7 a.m.- 5 p.m.** Trips with **Uber and Lyft** cost can cost as little as **\$4** each way. CARTA is the bus system in Charleston, SC. This program is also running in Denver, CO

[South Carolina Department on Aging \(SCDOA\) \(link\)](#) find your Area Agency on Aging

[Free AARP Events Online - AARP Virtual Community Center – AARP \(link\)](#)

Membership not required. Fitness, Yoga, Gentle Nia, Tia Chi/ Qi Gong, Zumba, Line Dancing, Caregiver Class, Tech classes, Cooking, Understanding Social Security

[Bing Videos \(link\)](#) Vagus Nerve Activation exercise 10 minutes, more active

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What Resources can you Share?

Other Questions?

Thank you for your time! I hope these resources can help you and your clients live a better life!

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