Work Smarter, Stress Less, Be Mindful

Zan Barry, Senior Program Manager
Today’s Agenda

• The power of stress resilience
• The power of full engagement
• The power of mindfulness
Arrows In, Arrows Out
The Healthy Mind Platter

- SLEEP TIME
- PHYSICAL TIME
- FOCUS TIME
- TIME IN
- DOWN TIME
- PLAY TIME
- CONNECTING TIME

The Healthy Mind Platter, for Optimal Brain Matter

Copyright © 2011 David Rock and Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. All rights reserved.
Stress Resilience
Stress Response: “Fight, Flight, Freeze”

• Every time your body triggers the fight, flight, freeze response, every system of your body mobilizes for action.

• You are bathed in stress hormones (cortisol, epinephrine, norepinephrine are released).

• Most of our daily stress responses are “false alarms.”
Too many false alarms

• Circulatory problems - chronic HBP
• Immune system problems - sick all the time
• Digestive problems
• Migraines and other headaches
• Reproductive issues
• Insomnia, depression, anxiety
• Chronic pain
Internalized Fight, Flight, Freeze

• Fight
  • Self-criticism

• Flight
  • Escapism, numbing out

• Freeze
  • Helpless, hopeless, stuck

Adapted from Christopher Germer, Ph.D., *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*
Effects of Cortisol
Effects of Cortisol

• Sleep disturbance
• Increased blood sugar
• Increased fat storage
• Increased appetite - even if you are not performing more physical activity - and cravings for “comfort food”
Cortisol secretion

Johns, MW et al. (1971) *Psychosomatic Medicine*
Reality check

- Less than 5% of the population has a genetic mutation allowing them to function normally on 6 hours of sleep per night.

He, Y. et al. (2009) Science
Decrease Cortisol

What decreases cortisol levels?

- Mindfulness meditation  (UC Davis Center for Mind and Brain, 2013)
- Massage
- Appropriate exercise for your conditioning level
- Music and regular dancing
- Yoga
- Laughter and humor
- Stand like Wonder Woman for 2 minutes
Recap: stress resilience

• Overstress is bad for performance
• Meditation is not “wasted time”
• It helps create the physiological foundation of stress resilience
The Power of Full Engagement
What Matters Most?

• Looking back on their lives, elders report on what they value most.
Flow

From Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience
by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (page 74)
Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi:

1. *intense and focused concentration* on the present moment
2. *merging of action and awareness*
3. *a loss of reflective self-consciousness*
How do we cultivate relaxed, high-quality attention?
The Power of Mindfulness
Mindfulness Benefits

- Increased focus and concentration
- Improved sleep
- Reduction in anxiety and depression
- Greater sense of well-being
- Enhanced immune function
- Stronger ability to cope with everyday stress
Cognitive control

- Delay of gratification
- Impulse management
- Emotional self-regulation
- Suppression of irrelevant thoughts
- Paying attention or learning readiness

ACC
• self-regulation: ability to purposefully direct attention and behavior;
• suppress knee-jerk responses;
• switch strategies flexibly;
• learn from past experience to support optimal decision-making.

Hippocampus
• key structure for resilience;
• covered in receptors for cortisol and can be damaged by chronic stress;
• smaller hippocampus associated with PTSD and depression.

Lazar, et al. 2015
Resources @ MIT

• 617/253-CALM (2256): The MIT Sleep and Relaxation Line
• Relaxation and meditation podcasts
• Wellness classes - Yoga, Tai Chi, MBSR
• Meditation for Your Wellbeing - 2nd Wednesdays 12:10-12:40 pm

mit.edu/wellness

• Weekly Relaxation - call MIT Mental Health and Counseling 617.253.2916
Resources

*Meditation for Beginners* book + CD (Jack Kornfield)

*Mindfulness for Beginners* audiobook/CD (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

*Walking Meditation* book + CD (Anh-Huong Nhuyen and Thich Nhat Hanh)

*How to Meditate* booklet (Tara Brach) http://tarabrach.com/how-to-meditate.html
Practice
Thank you!

Questions? Feel free to contact me.

- Zan Barry
  - Email: bars@med.mit.edu
  - Telephone: 617-253-3646

Community Wellness at MIT Medical provides expertise, health resources, and programs specifically designed for the MIT community. We also collaborate with our partners to create an environment supportive of health and wellness across the whole Institute. More info: mit.edu/wellness