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COUNTY FOCUS

Don't Fight Your Stress, Listen To It

Are you struggling with anxiety? Are you at war with your thoughts? You don't have to be. There are effective and peaceful ways of dealing with anxiety that comes from Eastern medicine. Although Western psychology has made some great leaps, sometimes seeing a therapist isn't enough. Western Medicine often practices a "war on disease", but if a person tries to **coerce** themselves out of negative self-talk, it may aggravate the war within themselves.

It is important to understand that trying to shut out or replace negative thoughts may backfire and activate a host of other problems that create a deeper lament for oneself. It may amplify the chatter of inner conflict and multiply the negative thoughts, adding to more and more anxiety. For this reason it is essential to include and hold space for even the unsavory parts of ourselves.

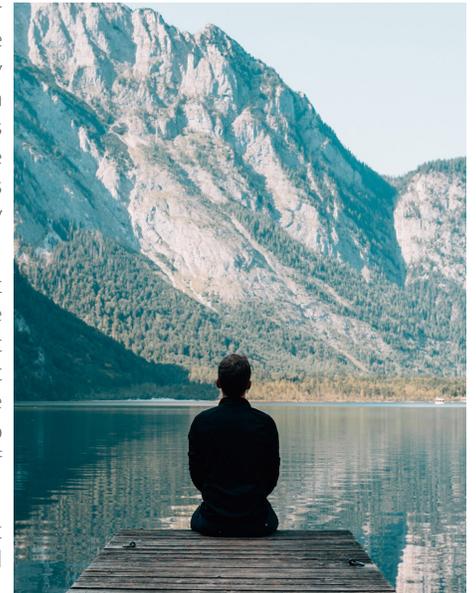
A more holistic way to reduce negative thoughts that contribute to anxiety is to integrate one's "internal parts" into agreement so that they can be at peace. Mindfulness and its deeper tenets provide us with an integrated body/mind model to practice and reduce our symptoms. For this we thank the great Eastern philosophies of Buddhism and Yoga with their various styles of mindfulness and disciplines.

Mindfulness meditation is a method of transforming how one experiences oneself by means of experiential self-study, typically through the bodily senses and breath.

- **Vipassana** is mindfulness that involves observing one's breath and scanning the body for sensation. This practiced experience, in turn, slows down one's internal chatter.
- The Buddhist principle of **equanimity** teaches us that all suffering and anxiety comes from **craving** or **aversion** associated with future longing or past regret. Reducing one's suffering involves a technique in scanning the body and remaining non-reactive to sensations or feelings as they arise. The meditator learns to attend to thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations without **reacting** or **judging**. In this way, one develops self-compassion and inner stability as a natural curative.

Learning to pay attention to symptoms of anxiety mindfully can lead to a serene state of calm abiding by allowing the psyche and nervous system to slow down, thereby, dismantling the structure of busy mental chatter that contributes to anxiety. Listening to one's symptoms can also bring insight about underlying emotional processes in the body. The meditator simply observes sensations systematically from head to toe and learns to become more curious and observant. This letting go of the need to coerce, fight or fix our negative thoughts can lead to greater peace and allow us to not be at war with ourselves.

Author Dmitry Vulfovich, Licensed Psychotherapist, is new to Santa Clara County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). He will be facilitating Body Oriented and Mindfulness therapeutic workshops in October and November 2018 through the Santa Clara County Learning and Employee Development Department (LED). Sign up through SCCLearn.com



The County of Santa Clara's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a labor-management sponsored, confidential, professional resource that provides counseling, assessment and referral services to County employees and their families who want help in solving personal and/or work-related problems.

When people are suffering from problems, it is easy to lose perspective. Life may seem confusing and difficult for a time, which can negatively affect work performance. If you have any questions or to schedule a counseling appointment, please call EAP at (408) 241-7772.



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Balancing Blended Families

Ever notice not all families look the same? There's certainly no one-size-fits-all model. With close to half of marriages ending in divorce, it's becoming more common to see blended families emerging. A blended family consists of a couple and their children from current and/or previous relationships. Unique growth opportunities often face these new family units.

BLENDING STRESSORS

Building a family intensifies interpersonal dynamics. All relationships take work, but the more people involved in a new family unit can multiply stress. Second marriages require intentional focus and commitment as divorce statistics are even higher than first marriages. Be aware of the following blended family stressors.

- **Negative emotions** - Custody arrangements can be stressful on their own. However, when a spouse needs to maintain contact with a former partner, negative emotions can ignite within you. Be mindful of jealousy, bitterness, and anger in your new relationship. There are likely to be different opinions on parenting decisions and styles. Encourage your partner to work toward a healthy, co-parenting relationship. When possible, stay calm and neutral.
- **Poor communication** - Failing to make time to talk is a recipe for disaster. In order to be on the same page with shared dreams, you must discuss what they are. Set goals for your new family

and talk about them. Decide what roles you and your partner will take in your relationship.

- **Time constraints** - Building a solid marriage is the best way to provide a strong family foundation. Prioritize time with one another. Set up date nights or plan a get-away without the children. Reminisce about why you fell in love.

HEALTHY HABITS

- **Word Power** - Commit to never speak poorly about any of the parents involved in front of your or your partner's children. Healthy co-parenting and interpersonal relationships will prove invaluable in the years ahead. Children sense discord, and a united front will help both children and parents in the transition.
- **Slow and steady** - When it comes to blended families, think long-term. Patience and authenticity are keys to developing a solid relationship between child and step-parent, or bonus parent. Children may need time to warm up to you or may feel like they are betraying a parent by welcoming you. Be sure to validate feelings for everyone involved. Give your and your partner's children permission to express their opinions and thoughts as you journey together.

Blending families takes work, but the rewards are worth the investment.



THINKING WELL

Alzheimer's Awareness

Everyone experiences momentary forgetfulness. Simple things like the inability to remember a word or place can leave one feeling a bit unsettled. It can be frightening to feel powerless to remember something. This is just one symptom millions of Americans feel who live with Alzheimer's disease.

WHAT IS ALZHEIMER'S?

If you've heard someone discussing Alzheimer's, there's a good chance the word dementia was tossed in there too. The terms Alzheimer's and dementia are often used interchangeably. However, dementia is a general term for memory loss and cognitive disabilities affecting daily life. Alzheimer's, rather, is a specific, progressive disease affecting neurons in the brain and interrupting the signal path of neurotransmitters. Over time the brain begins to shrink as nerve cells die. This destruction of nerve cells causes the memory loss, inability to perform daily tasks, and personality changes that affect those with Alzheimer's.

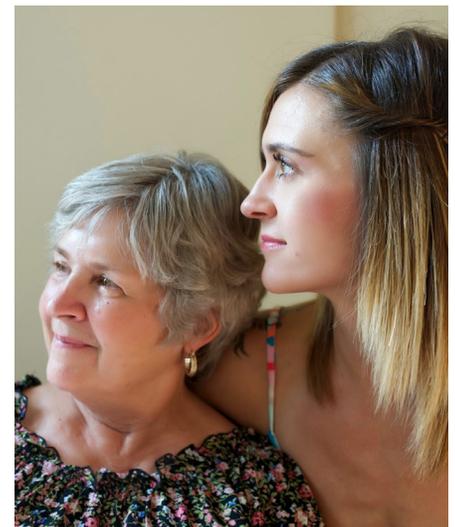
EARLY ALZHEIMER'S SIGNS

Many symptoms of Alzheimer's can often

be confused with the normal signs of aging. In fact, the early stages of Alzheimer's are often undetected. Remembering new information is one of the first symptoms to present. Memory loss is often mild in the early stages of Alzheimer's. As the disease progresses, individuals are not able to carry on a conversation or respond to their surroundings. Alzheimer's is the sixth largest cause of death in the United States.

While one in three seniors are diagnosed with Alzheimer's, individuals younger than 65 can also be affected, known as younger-onset Alzheimer's. Know the signs to look for in all age ranges.

- Difficulty performing formerly familiar tasks
- Confusion with time or place
- Vision changes or spatial reasoning difficulty
- New challenges with speaking or writing
- Misplacing items and getting lost
- Changes in judgment
- Ignoring work, social activities, or hobbies
- Mood or personality changes



- Increased fear, suspicion, and confusion

If you or someone you love is questioning whether Alzheimer's is an issue, contact your doctor. A medical exam with questions about your overall health and possible brain imaging scans can help determine if Alzheimer's is a factor. While a diagnosis might sound overwhelming, there are doctors and support programs ready to help guide you and your loved one through the next stages of life.



Summer bucket lists. From the beach to the boardwalk, lazy naps in the hammock, to endless hours of swimming and sand castles. Whatever might be on your summer bucket list, we can all agree that sun damage is certainly not one of them.

WHY HELLO, MR. SUN!

Sun exposure gets a bad rap many times. Our bodies actually require sunlight to produce vitamin D, a hormone necessary for strong bones and a healthy immune system. However, when it comes to sunshine, a little goes a long way.

Ultraviolet (UV) rays are a type of sunlight and an unseen form of radiation which alter our skin cells. Ultraviolet A and B rays can prematurely age, wrinkle, and burn your skin. Too much exposure to UVA and/or UVB rays increases your risk of skin cancer. It's vital we protect the body's biggest organ, our skin!

SIDESTEP SUN DAMAGE

Stay summer ready with the following sun safety tips.

- **Timing** - When possible, avoid peak sun hours. Generally the sun is most intense between 10 AM and 2 PM.
- **Apparel** - Sunglasses, hats, and breathable shirts add a smart layer of defense from harmful rays.
- **Slather and Spray** - Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen to protect from UVA and UVB rays. Apply sunscreen to dry skin at least 15 minutes before outdoor time. Coat all skin surfaces

exposed to the sun, including: face, ears, hands, arms, legs, lips, feet, and even your scalp. Remember to reapply regularly!

- **Choose Wisely** - Sunscreens that contain oxybenzone and octinoxate have been linked to skin allergies, damage in the oceans, and other hormonal changes in humans. Look for sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide as the active ingredient.
- **Shading** - Utilize nature. Take advantage of existing shading from trees, landscaping, and buildings. When all else fails, pack an umbrella or sun tent for additional shade.
- **Hydration** - The sun's rays are sure to wipe you out. Drink plenty of fluids to keep your body hydrated.

Nothing quite compares to the warm sunshine on your face. Cheers to summer!



SOUND FINANCES
Making Cents of Retirement Accounts

Regardless of how much anyone loves their career, most people would like to retire—some of us sooner than later. When we're able to do so largely depends on how we plan now. Making wise financial choices today can pay dividends in retirement tomorrow.

THE GOOD NEWS OF 1974

No one wants to lose what they've worked hard to obtain. Washington agrees, which is why the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) of 1974 was created. ERISA protects millions of Americans' assets. It ensures the funds placed in retirement plans during the working years will be present for retirement years. ERISA works to protect employers and employees alike by establishing standards in private industry.

Employers are not required to offer a retirement plan as part of a benefits package. However, if they choose to do so, federal law requires employers to have a retirement plan administrator, someone who provides the most important facts about the retirement and health benefits package to employees. The plan

administrator is legally obligated to provide a summary plan description describing what is offered and how it works.

THE 401 ON RETIREMENT PLANS

There are a variety of employer retirement plan options, including: 401(k), 403(b), SEP, and SIMPLE IRA. With all the abbreviations and numbers, the language of retirement savings can seem ambiguous and confusing. Below are a few simple points about each type. However, you should always feel welcome to talk with your employer's plan administrator to better understand your options.

- **401(k)** - This feature of a qualifying, profit-sharing plan allows for an employee to contribute a portion of their wages to an individual account. These allocations are invested pre-tax until withdrawn at retirement. Employers may also contribute to an employee's 401(k) plan.
- **403(b)** - This program is offered exclusively by public schools and select 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations. Employees contribute to individual

accounts. These plans may also be referred to as a tax-sheltered annuity (TSA).

- **Simplified Employee Pension** - An SEP plan can provide a substantial amount of income at an employee's retirement. This is done when an employer allocates up to 25% of an employee's wage into a retirement account. This also includes self-employed individuals.
- **SIMPLE IRA** - This acronym, which stands for Savings Incentive Match Plan for Employees, is a retirement plan allowing employers and employees to contribute to a traditional IRA, or individual retirement account. This is beneficial for smaller companies who do not sponsor a specific retirement plan. Self-employed individuals also qualify here.

Benefit statements for your individual retirement plan are required once every three years. Many plans offer quarterly or annual statements. Be sure to review your information for accuracy and report any errors or changes in name, address, marital status, social security number, and salary.



COACH APPROACH

Identifying Feelings

Ever wonder why we think, say, or act the way we do? Unfortunately, as much as we'd like to blame bad pizza, our feelings are the big culprits. Feelings are large influencers to our thoughts and actions. Regardless if people seem "hard as stone" or "a big softie," everyone has feelings. Learning to identify feelings is a worthwhile investment toward improving our mental health, relationships, and self-awareness.

ALL ABOUT FEELINGS

We can define feelings as emotional states, reactions, or experiences. Even as our physical bodies experience feelings through the sense of touch (soft, sharp, scratchy, etc.), we can also categorize our internal state, or emotions.

While some people might think feelings are uniquely feminine, they actually serve an important function in all our lives. From cavemen to modern man, feelings stem from a survival mechanism. We're wired with feelings to adapt our bodies to handle anything from simple situations to catastrophic chaos.

FIGURING OUT FEELINGS

Feelings often direct our thinking, leading us down paths of what we choose to do (or not do). Undoubtedly, our society and sum experiences play a large role in shaping our feelings. Even how we express feelings is linked to our external surroundings. It's important to connect with and express our feelings in a mutually respectful way. The inability to do so will inevitably cause problems

in relationships, communication, and overall satisfaction in life. Take control of your feelings with the following tips.

- **Temperature** - Check your emotional "temperature" by asking, "How am I feeling?"
 - Avoid vague answers like good or bad, fine or okay. These tend to be more judgments than actual feelings.
 - Probe a bit further. Ask yourself, "What kind of good?" or "What kind of bad?" Good can mean happy, relaxed, satisfied, etc. Bad might mean scared, sad, nervous, or mad.
 - Our physical bodies often offer clues as to what we're feeling. Be mindful of how you're breathing, if your stomach hurts, or your muscles feel tense. Maybe we have a nervous laugh or bite our fingernails. Play detective on yourself by tuning in to your body.
- **Perspective** - Keep in mind that feelings are not good or bad but rather an experience. Granted, some feelings are more pleasant than others, but what we do with our feelings is more important than the actual emotion itself. Consider re-framing feelings with the words "helpful or hurtful." This perspective removes judgment and instead, focuses on the outcome that our feelings may influence.

Life is full of experiences outside of our control, and feelings are really no different. Begin to empower yourself by identifying your feelings and taking control of what you do with them.



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EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Lyle Labardee, M.S., LPC, NCC

MANAGING EDITOR
Tyler Higley, M.A., LLPC

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER
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GRAPHIC DESIGNER
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SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS
Richard Switzer, M.D., FAAP, FACP
Internal Medicine and Pediatrics

Ron Vanderbeck, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist

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COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA
Employee Assistance Program

1885 The Alameda, Suite 211
San Jose, CA 95126

(408) 241-7772

www.scceap.org