

SELF-CARE:

YOUR TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT

by Lucia Thornton

You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn to surf.
~ Jack Kornfield



An Overwhelming Reality

As a student nurse you face enormous challenges, stressors and workload. Studies have shown that student nurses experience higher levels of stress than medical, social work, or pharmacy students. Student nurses can experience stress severe enough to induce anxiety or depression.

Stress has been implicated in an entire array of problems involving every system of the body. Stress can cause back pain, muscle aches and pains, tension headaches, grinding of teeth and jaw pain. It can create migraine headaches, dizziness, difficulty breathing, heartburn, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, hives, chest pain, rapid heartbeat and sexual problems. It can result in anxiety, nervous habits, sleep problems, inability to concentrate, and a wide variety of other behavioral problems. Some researchers and physicians have claimed that stress contributes to illnesses.

So take a moment to reflect on your life. Do you have any of the symptoms mentioned above? Are you feeling overwhelmed? If so, now is the time to adopt practices that can help to buffer your response to stress and help you master the stressful moments of your life.



© Thinkstock

Your #1 Priority: Taking Care of Yourself

One of the first lessons you need to learn is the importance and primacy of taking care of yourself. Traditionally nurses have put themselves last on the list when it comes to being cared for. Nurses will take care of everyone else before they take time to care for themselves.

You have all heard the flight attendants on airplanes announce if you are traveling with someone who is dependant upon you to “first place the oxygen mask over your face, before placing the mask on the person needing your assistance.” In other words, you must first care for yourself before you can care for others. If you are compromised you cannot give good care to another. Caring for yourself is a prerequisite to providing a caring and healing presence for others. *Here's a quick checklist to get you started on your self-care journey!* ▶

Start Your Day with Inspiration and Intention: Set aside time when you first wake up for prayer, reflection, meditation and to set an intention for the day. Make it a habit to begin your day with whatever spiritual practice you choose and during this time create an intention for what you want to manifest during the day. Creating an intention sets into motion what you will achieve. Setting aside 5-10 minutes when you first wake up to engage in a spiritual practice sets the tone for the entire day and will help you move through challenges with grace and equanimity.



Engage in Daily Exercise / Movement: One of the best antidotes for stress is exercise. Exercise and movement improves the functioning of nearly every part of the body that stress adversely affects. Bringing movement and exercise into your life that is fun and lively nurtures your mind, heart and spirit as well as your body. Consider jumping rope, walking the dog, dancing, zumba, cycling, yoga, tai chi, jogging, skipping - any activity that you enjoy and can easily incorporate into your daily schedule. Thirty to forty five minutes daily is ideal but twenty minutes of exercise each day is better than none. If you are just starting to exercise begin with 15 minutes of mild to moderate activity and increase the intensity and duration gradually. Exercise strengthens your immune system, improves the transport of food through your GI tract, helps regulate your blood pressure, stimulates circulation, reduces LDL cholesterol, improves sleep, increases stamina, helps you lose fat, improves your mood, reduces physical tension, increases oxygen to all organs, decreases your risk of osteoporosis and diabetes, and possibly protects against cancer of the colon, breast, ovaries and cervix. Exercise and movement can literally change your life!



(Continued on page 36 ♡)

(Continued from page 35)

Eat Whole and Nutritious Foods: Eating healthy when pressed for time requires creative planning. Setting aside a couple hours each week to prepare food for the entire week is a great way to maximize your time and ensure a supply of nutritious meals and snacks. If you have children this is a great time to involve them in meal preparation and to teach them healthy patterns of eating. In two hours you can prepare meals and snacks for the entire week. This will save time in the long run and will provide you with nutritious meals and snacks throughout the week. If you live in a dorm or don't have access to a kitchen gravitate toward the "healthy choices" on the menu and have on hand raw almonds, veggies, fruit, low fat string cheese or popcorn (low-fat) for nutritious snacks.



Optimal Fiber and Water Intake: Getting enough fiber and water is essential in maintaining a healthy immune and digestive system and keeping your weight at a desirable level. If you are a woman under 50 your fiber intake should be at least 25 gms; if you are a man under 50 your fiber intake should be around 38 gms/daily. While eating legumes, whole-grains, fruits and vegetables are important it may be useful to add natural concentrated fiber such as psyllium or ground flax seed to increase your fiber intake. The number of ounces of water you need daily can be estimated by dividing your body weight by 2. So if you weigh 150lbs you would want to consume approximately (150 divided by 2 = 75) 75 ounces of water daily. Dehydration causes many undesirable physiological responses including increased histamine and cholesterol levels and the release of stress hormones. So make sure to stay hydrated and keep your water bottle close at hand!



Supplement as Needed: Your body requires increased levels of vitamin A, C, and E, thiamine, riboflavin and protein when under stress. Eating whole natural foods, especially fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes gives the body the added nutrients you need during times of stress. However, it may be necessary to take added supplements to provide you with sufficient amounts of these nutrients. Also during stressful times your metabolism increases so eating 5-6 small portioned, low calorie, nutritious meals during the day is beneficial.

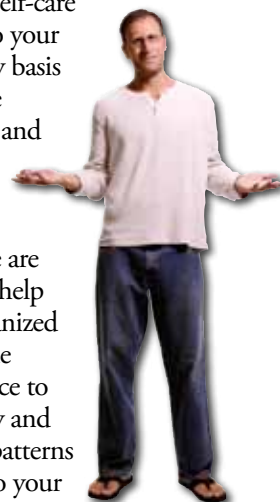


Adequate and Restful Sleep : Studies vary on the ideal amount of sleep needed but generally you should get between 6 ½ to 8 hours each night. One of the first areas that students will compromise in order to "fit everything in" is their sleep time. Unfortunately, the extra hours you spend studying by depriving yourself of sleep are counterproductive to learning. Sleep loss impairs cognitive function, and can cause rigid thinking, reduced verbal fluency, impaired memory, inability to deal with the unexpected, shorter attention span, impaired memory, and a longer reaction time. These are functions that are critical to performing well in both the clinical and academic settings. Getting enough sleep will help ensure that your academic and clinical performance is optimal.



"But I Don't Have Time to Take Care of Myself !"

You will find that once you begin to incorporate self-care activities into your life on a daily basis you will have more energy and accomplish much more than you did before. Here are a few tips to help you stay organized and create the time and space to bring healthy and wholesome patterns of living into your life.



©Thinkstock

1. Use a daily planner or calendar to track assignments, projects and class times.
2. Prioritize your assignments, allocating specific times for each project and subject, then stick to those times.
3. Designate a specific area for studying and also for relaxation and down time.
4. Create a routine bedtime and build in 15 minutes of relaxation prior to bedtime for relaxing. A bath with soothing essential oils or salts, an inspirational or fictional book, gentle stretching, restorative yoga, or meditation will foster more restful sleep.
5. Schedule time in the morning for reflection, intention setting and exercise.

Creating a regular time to go to bed each night will help regulate your biorhythm and make you more resilient to the stressors in your life. Also scheduling 5-10 minutes in the morning for reflection and intention setting followed by a 30 to 45 minute program of movement or exercise will help you greet each day with inspiration, a positive attitude, and abundant energy.

Remember, you must take care of yourself before you can care well for others.



©Thinkstock

Nursing school definitely creates many stressors, however, by developing a permanent practice of self-care and organizing your day you will be empowered to meet those challenges and create a healthier and happier you. Remember, you must take care of yourself before you can care well for others. Start today – you deserve it! ∞



Lucia Thornton,
a holistic nurse educator and consultant

is the immediate past-president of the American Holistic Nurses Association. Her work in transforming hospitals into “healing environments” has received national, state and local recognition. Lucia can be contacted at luciat@csufresno.edu

Recipient of the First “Excellence in Holistic Nursing Education Award”



The Nursing Department at the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB-TSC) was the first recipient of the American Holistic Nurses Association’s (AHNA) annual Excellence in Holistic Nursing Education Award.

The purpose of this award is to recognize programs in nursing that reflect the highest standards of holistic nursing education through exceptional, substantive and innovative curriculum and/or courses. As far back as 2001 the National Student Nurses’ Association created a resolution “In Support of Increased Awareness and Education of Holistic Nursing”. This award supports NSNA’s resolution and furthers the AHNA’s mission of bringing caring and healing back into the healthcare system and nursing education.



♦ Accepting the award on behalf of UTB-TSC were Anne Rentfro, Coordinator for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program and Sally Roach, Associate Professor of Nursing. According to Rentfro, “The core value of self-care for nurses in any practice area guides our decisions about curriculum, curriculum revision, course development, course revision and course projects. Our faculty members believe that this particular AHNA core value is integral to the baccalaureate prepared nurse’s therapeutic use of self.”

The American Holistic Nurses Association’s

Standards of Nursing Practice are embedded within all courses in the program and serve as a guide for faculty and students. Innovation plays a major role in the ongoing development of the program. Students design projects using holistic approaches, exposing them to individuals and families in their community, including a broad spectrum of age groups from children to the elderly. Moreover, faculty model caring behavior by promptly answering email, communicating in caring manner on the course website, establishing virtual office hours, valuing students’ input and maintaining open communication.

Future plans include assuring opportunities for students to review and sit for the American Holistic Nursing Certification exam and to attend the AHNA annual conference through academic and scholarship incentives.



♦ Congratulations to the UTB-TSC nursing community for creating, supporting and growing such an exemplar holistic nursing program!