Section 6

Purpose

Section 6 introduces what stress is, how physical activity helps manage stress, and how to make healthy food choices when feeling stressed.

Equipment and Materials Needed

- Reserve the computer lab. You will need one computer for each student.
- Earphones are recommended.

Procedure

- **Before class:** Make sure the computers are functional and the website is open for the students to login.
- **During class:** Use the supplemental content to answer any questions that the students may have about the content.
- **At the end of class:** Help the students successfully log off and answer any questions they may have.

Supplemental Content

A. What Is Stress?

Stress is a normal physiological response of the body to events that make you feel threatened or overwhelmed. The human body responds to stress by activating the sympathetic nervous system and stimulating adrenal glands to secrete adrenaline and cortisol into the bloodstream. As a result, heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and metabolism speed up. Moreover, pupils dilate to improve vision, the liver releases stored glucose to increase body's energy, and sweat is produced to cool the body. All of these changes prepare the body to respond to a stressful situation. Stress is not always bad. In small doses, it can motivate the person to do well at the task at hand, be it an exam, a game, or performance.

B. What Can Constant Stress Do to You?

It is the long-term stressful situations that can produce lasting low-level stress that can be hard on people. Under chronic stress, the nervous system remains slightly activated and continues to pump extra hormones over an extended period. This can leave the person feeling depleted and overwhelmed, weaken the immune system, and cause other problems.

Stress affects the mind, body, and behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently. Common symptoms of stress include a fast heartbeat, a headache,
a stiff neck or tight shoulder, back pain, fast breathing, sweating, upset stomach, nausea or diarrhea.

Stress can also cause emotional symptoms such as moodiness, irritability or short temper, agitation, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness, depression or general unhappiness.

Some people also experience behavioral symptoms such as eating more or less, sleeping too much or too little, isolating yourself from others, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, substance (alcohol, cigarettes, drugs) abuse, or nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing).

C. Stressful Situations

Stressors are situations that put a high demand on you or force you to adjust. Even some positive events in life such as getting married, buying a house, going to college, or receiving a promotion can be stressful. A person's perception of a situation in part determines the person's anxiety; for example, a morning commute can make some people anxious and tense while others may enjoy listening to music or news while commuting. Stress is caused by personal problems or social and job issues:

- Health: especially if a person has a chronic illness.
- Emotional problems: depression, grief, guilt or low self-esteem.
- Relationships: having problems with your relationships or feeling a lack of friendships or support in your life.
- Major life changes: death of a parent or a spouse, losing job, getting married or moving to a new city.
- Stress in your family: having a child, teen, or other family member who is under stress, or being a caregiver to a family member who is elderly or has health problems.
- Conflicts with your beliefs and values: a person valuing family life is not able to make enough time for family.
- Social and job issues
- Your surroundings: chronic stress can be created by living in an area where over crowding, crime, pollution, or noises are a problem.
- Your job/school: Ongoing problems with schoolwork due to lack of motivation, learning disability, or other problems.
- Your social situation: being poor, feeling lonely, and facing gender, age, sex or racial discrimination.

D. Stress Overload Symptoms

Everyone's ability to handle stress is different. Even for the same person, one's ability to handle stress differs, depending on many internal and external factors.
Adolescence is a stressful period of life. Headaches, sleepiness, stomachaches, mood swings, or acting out may be signs of stress overload in a child.

E. Stress and a Healthy Lifestyle

Unchecked stress is undeniably damaging, there are many things one can do to reduce its impact and cope with symptoms. Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can't, taking care of yourself, and making time for rest and relaxation. Stress management skills work best when they are used regularly, not just when the pressure is on.

F. How to Take Charge Over Stress Eating

Being aware of what you are eating is a clue to eating when you aren't hungry. Keeping a food diary may help identify those times when stress eating is occurring.

G. Ways to Relieve Stress

Here are some things that can keep stress under control:

- Take a stand against over scheduling
- Be realistic and do not try to be perfect
- Get a good night’s sleep
- Learn to relax by engaging in activities that are calming and pleasurable
- Treat your body well by exercising and eating healthy
- Keep your outlook, attitude and thoughts positive
- Solve the little problems to build the inner confidence to move on to life's bigger ones

The best way to manage your stress is to use stress relief techniques focusing on relaxing your mind and your body. Mind can be relaxed by letting your feelings out by talking to someone you trust or writing out what is bothering you. Doing something you enjoy also helps to relax the mind. Body can be relaxed by exercising regularly and using other relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing. When practiced regularly, these activities lead to a reduction in your everyday stress levels and a boost in your feelings of joy and serenity.

H. Ways to Relieve Diabetes-Related Stress

Chronic disease is stressful. In addition to tips already provided, students can use the resources provided in this section, or share with parents. These resources may also be good to review if additional discussions with the students are planned.

Supplemental Activity Online: Have students visit the Fun Place for games and activities to re-enforce concepts, especially crossword puzzles.
Supplemental Activity Offline: Practice regular breathing. Have students think about their favorite place, pet or food for 3 minutes. Take an exercise break for a few minutes: jumping jacks, balance on one leg, open dancing, or arm circles.