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Summary

- Medical conditions, illness and injury can cause stress that further affects our health.
- Lifestyle factors – such as worry and anxiety, stress and tension, diet, exercise, sleep and social support – can affect the symptoms of illness and recovery.
- There are many things that can be done to help relieve the symptoms of illness or injury, and improve recovery.
- Positive thinking, relaxation, a healthy diet, regular exercise, good sleep and social support can all promote health and wellbeing.

Medical conditions, illness or injury are frequently stressful and may disrupt our lives. A healthy diet, regular exercise, sleep and social support can relieve or manage the symptoms of illness or injury and help improve recovery. Taking a positive view can also make a huge difference to recovery from illness.

Worrying or negative thinking

Worrying or thinking negatively about possible situations can be harmful. It adds to your levels of anxiety or stress and can adversely affect your health. Some strategies to reduce worrying include:

- When you start to worry, write down your concerns and the possible consequences, both negative and positive. Look at each scenario and think about possible good points. Remind yourself that you can and will be able to cope.
- Seek out information about your prognosis and likely outcomes.
- Realistically assess your worries and think about other things. Talk to a friend or to a psychologist.
- Find a variety of activities to focus on each day – for example, reading, walking or watching a movie. Even if you can only manage short periods at a time because you find activity difficult, make sure your day is varied and challenging.

Stress and tension

Stress and tension can affect you physically in many ways, including increased muscle tension and chronic contraction. This may be experienced as tension in the eyes, jaw, neck, shoulders, lower back and stomach. Prolonged muscle tension can lead to aches and pains, such as headaches, migraine, backache, muscular spasm and injury.

To help reduce stress and physical tension:

- Learn to recognise the signs of tension in your body. Stop regularly and think about how muscles in your body feel. Identify those muscles that seem most tense when you feel stressed.
- Regularly practise slow and deep breathing, particularly when you feel tense or stressed. Deep breathing using abdominal muscles is preferable to shallow breathing relying on chest muscles.
- Learn to take time out to relax – for example, think of pleasant images and listen to music to calm you.
- Learn a deep muscle relaxation technique, such as progressive muscle relaxation – that is, a method of systematically contracting and relaxing your muscles. See a psychologist for training.

Diet, exercise and sleep

A healthy diet, regular exercise and adequate sleep can help you to cope with a medical condition, illness or injury. Sometimes, medication and treatment for a condition, or the pain caused by it, can have an impact on your appetite, energy levels and sleeping patterns. Talk with your doctor about ways of managing these unwanted effects of medication.

Improve your diet

To maintain a healthy diet:

- Eat regularly throughout the day rather than one or two heavy meals.
- Choose nutritious foods that you enjoy eating.
- If you don't feel like eating, try having small amounts often.
- Avoid inappropriate foods – don't have them in the house.
- Tell your family and friends about your diet needs so they can support you.

Keep active

Regular exercise promotes health and wellbeing and helps prevent injury. Do some physical activity every day, even if it is only a small amount. See your specialist for advice on exercise that will suit your condition.

Get enough sleep

Sleep is very important if you have a medical condition. To help you get enough good sleep:

- Try not to nap during the day.
- Lie in bed only if you plan to sleep, not for other activities like watching TV.
- Don't have stimulants, such as tea or coffee, at night.
- Exercise during the day so your body is ready for sleep at night.

Get the support you need

Social support can help you maintain your quality of life when you are ill. To help you find and maintain support:

- Plan to catch up with family and friends. Keep a regular schedule of contact throughout each week.
- Tell your family and friends about your condition and let them know how they can help you.
- Consider new sources of support, such as support groups, clubs, interest groups and volunteer opportunities.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Your local community health centre
- The Australian Psychological Society Tel. (03) 8662 3300
- National Psychologist Referral Service Tel. 1800 333 497

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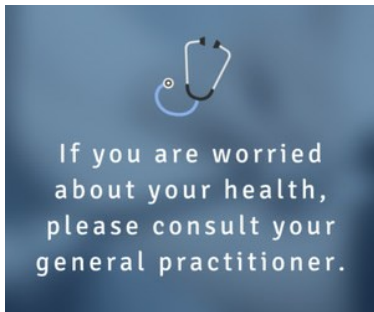
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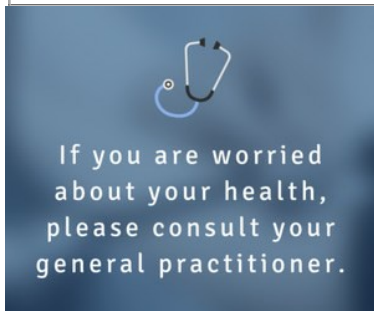
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