

## HEALTHY PLEASURES

Have you ever noticed yourself feeling off-kilter after a few days of house-guests or being in an unfamiliar environment like when on vacation? Oftentimes, when we get off schedule due to a new context, we tend to flounder a bit. Well, at least some of us do!

Noticing this phenomenon for many years, I've encouraged people I'm working with in therapy to discipline themselves to take time to connect with themselves each morning prior to a full day of activity with houseguests or while vacationing. Without dedicating some time to some form of self-maintenance each morning it's real easy for the train to fly off the tracks. Our personal wellbeing is easily shattered.

A couple I was working with who were relocating to another city went on a house-hunting trip. Realizing they both had strong opinions about choosing just the right house, I urged them to take time each morning before embarking to center themselves so as to reduce the likelihood of butting heads with one another. They actually ran with the idea and together we developed it into a five-part process that they labeled the "Fabulous Five" in honor of the 1991 University of Michigan basketball team that made it to two consecutive national championship games.

### FABULOUS FIVE

Here are five steps that will equip you to better deal with the inevitable stresses of modern life.

#### Exercise

Discipline yourself to begin each day with life-giving, mood-elevating exercise. Ideally, for optimum, overall fitness spend a minimum of 15 minutes doing some form of stretching as we tend to lose our natural elasticity as we age. Also, my motto is "A loose spine equals an open mind!" It's easy to get crotchety when we're stiff.

Next a minimum of 30 minutes of aerobic or cardio-pulmonary where we perspire and our heart rate goes to 80% of our maximum capability. This sparks the production of the neurotransmitters we need to elevate our mood. Endorphins have us feeling stronger and more capable.

Then we need at least 15 minutes of weight resistance training. Pumping a little iron gives us the musculature we need to do "ADL's" or Activities of Daily Living. Two little barbells may be all we need.

Of course, since only about 20% of our fellow citizens exercise with any regularity, it's very easy to rationalize not doing it. Here are three keys to persist in exercising:

1. Develop your own style and schedule so you acquire a positive addiction. Taylor what you do to the uniqueness of you. Be sure to utilize an every

- other day regimen so you minimize boredom. If you don't enjoy it, you won't keep doing it.
2. Make a clear decision, a total and full commitment, and then watch your self-talk or you'll talk yourself out of it. For example, "I'm too tired! It's too cold! It's too hot! I don't have time! I hate exercise!"
  3. Get an exercise buddy. Encourage and support one another. We know how easy it is to not do it.

### **Meditation/Mindfulness/Quiet Time/Prayer Time**

This activity ranks right up there with exercise as being an absolute must. We can conceptualize meditation in three realms. It is equally valid and valuable psychologically or medically, spiritually and professionally in your job world. Taming or quieting our mind allows us to access the endlessly rich resources available in our unconscious mind. It's taking the time to be okay with ourselves and with however we think of the Divine Presence within us. We're then positioning ourselves to be okay with other people. As with exercise, tenacity is paramount. We need refueling every day. (See The Relaxation Response by Herbert Benson, M.D.)

### **Couple's Dialogue/Connecting**

As human beings we're saddled with separateness that we can't quite overcome, yet we have the inborn desire to overcome it and connect with one another. (See Erich Fromm's, The Art of Loving). So it's wise to have one or more close friends, people with whom we feel safe to share ourselves.

This is doubly important for married couples. How easy it is to live together but not be emotionally connected. Like exercise and meditation, we really need to schedule time each day to open ourselves up to one another. It's dangerous to be a "Married Single," i.e. you're married but you're single. Check with your spouse every day. Say "How are we doing?" or "How am I doing?" Stay connected.

### **Sexual Intimacy and/or Massage**

No matter how old we are, touching each other feels soothing. As we age, our physical abilities dwindle and penile-vaginal intercourse may no longer be attainable, but we still benefit tremendously from regular sexual intimacy. Like exercise, meditation and emotional intimacy, it is extremely easy to not take time for sexual intimacy. We have to put it in our smartphone. We have to make the time to hug and kiss. (See Touching by Ashley Montagu or Touch by David J.Linden)

Remember orgasms?! They produce that pervasive feeling of well being by activating Oxytocin levels in our brains. This neurotransmitter increases our ability to trust and be more loving and caring. We need more Oxytocin! More Oxytocin means less cardiovascular stress and a stronger immune system. (See The Moral Molecule by Paul Zak, Ph.D.) Remember, hugs heal.

### **Hot Tub/Hot Bath/Hot Shower**

Hot, like Oxytocin, has us relax, release stress and feel peace. What more need I say?!

### **Healthy Pleasures**

We need to take time for the Fabulous Five. We don't have to do all of them every day but if we did we'd certainly benefit in myriad ways. Our Puritan inheritance may have us believing that Fab Five pleasure is somehow negative or hedonistic. Research tells us our body, mind and spirit are enriched and renewed by healthy pleasures such as leisure time, tasty food, music, art, sports, naps, friends and watching sunrise and sunset.

Imagine a medical treatment that is safe, inexpensive and readily available, and whose only side effect is that it makes you feel good! This medical treatment decreases heart disease, boosts our psychoneuro-immune system, relieves depression and blocks pain. What is it? It is the Fabulous Five and the other healthy pleasures mentioned herein. Pinch yourself! Take time for Healthy Pleasures, whatever they may be! (See Healthy Pleasures by Robert Ornstein, Ph.D. and David Sobel, M.D.)

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