***Stress Management Training***

Session Eight: Lecture Script

***Changing Your Lifestyle***

Our Lives are full of events and circumstances that create stress; filling in forms, waiting in queues, work, family arguments, doing the shopping, noise pollution, driving, can all be stressful.

Stress Management Training can help you to respond more positively to such stresses. There are, however, two other areas to look at in stress reduction; diet and exercise.

What we eat and how we eat it can play an important part in stress management. When we are stressed we are more likely to eat too quickly, thereby putting strain on the digestive system. Some people respond to stress by not eating, losing weight and strength. Others may respond by overeating, which can put additional strain on the entire body. Certain food and drinks put a particular strain on our bodies and are directly responsible for increased stress. Caffeine, for instance stimulates the nervous system, the heart , the respiratory system, and the adrenal glands, this actually triggers stress. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, cocoa and cola drinks. This should be cut out altogether or only taken in moderation. Herb teas and fruit juices are healthy substitutes.

Sugar also causes stress. When you eat sugar, the body interprets the increased blood sugar level as a sign that you are in the Fight or Flight situation. In Britain, the average sugar consumption per person is 120 pounds each year. Sugar is not just found in sweets, cakes and biscuits, it is also in many breakfast cereals, tinned fruits and vegetables, white bread and many convenience foods. Honey or brown sugar are not healthy substitutes, they also trigger stress.

Alcohol can produce stress; it places a burden on the detoxification system, and although it may make you feel temporarily less anxious, the overall effects are stressful. The same is true of cigarettes. You may think they are helping you to relax but actually, nicotine is a chemical stimulant and therefore adds to stress. Alcohol should only be taken in moderation, and cigarettes should not be used at all. Consult your doctor if you need help to stop smoking.

Too much salt in our diets causes stress, you do not need to add salt to your cooking, you will get all the salt your body needs in the rest of your diet. The best diet to adopt to reduce stress and for general health is a wholefood diet, which avoids processed foods, food additives and preservatives, and over-refined foods. The diet should be low in animal fats, which can be substituted with polyunsaturated oils and their products, such as sunflower oil. Skimmed milk, low fat cheese and yogurts are healthy, and animal protein is best obtained from offal, oily fish and poultry. Beans, pulses, brown rice and other whole grains are good, as are fresh fruit and vegetables. Changes to a healthier diet can be made slowly and piecemeal. Some healthy food is better than no healthy food.

Exercise is important too in stress reduction , and for general health. Exercise tones the muscles and strengthens the heart, clears the lungs and helps keep weight down. Exercise can also keep your muscles free from unnecessary tensions. Walking, jogging, swimming, or cycling are good active forms of exercise, but it is important to build up your exercise programme slowly, so as not to cause strain. You should discuss any significant changes in your exercise programme with your doctor. Yoga and Tai Chi Chuan are both good for gentle exercise. It is important that your training is guided by an experienced teacher.

Exercise has more than physical benefits. People who exercise regularly tend to be more flexible in their thinking and beliefs. Thy have a stronger sense of self-sufficiency, self-acceptance and less depression. Regular exercise contributes to positive changes in other ways.. Setting aside the time for regular exercise requires taking firm control of your daily timetable, which gives you a feeling of being in charge of your life. Exercise also teaches you to pay attention to your body’s needs, and helps you to see your body as a friend, deserving your care and attention. Having a regular exercise programme is a way of saying that you are important.

If you can see ways to make improvements in your diet and exercise programme, you’ll very quickly feel the benefits. A healthy diet, regular exercise and daily practise of your Stress Management Relaxation Exercises will have many positive effects on your life. You may find that your memory and concentration improve, you will experience much less fatigue, you may find you need less sleep, but actually sleep more deeply, and feel better rested. You will work more efficiently and may find that as you become more relaxed your relationships with others improve. Remember, in order for Stress Management Training to work, you must actually practise it, and apply all the skills you have learned to every aspect of your life.