Stress and Eating Dysregulation

How stress gets under the skin

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Objectives

● Learn eating disorder symptoms based on DSM 5 criteria
● Learn what stress is, and is not
● Understand role of stress in eating dysregulation
● Take away tools to help family members manage stress and eating
Why am I here today?

- Eating disorders are not always physically apparent
  - Address changes with the DSM-5
- Learn role of stress in eating dysregulation
- Provide tools
- Help you recognize indicators of distress
Relevant concepts

- **Metabolic Equation**

- **Body Mass Index (kg/m^2):**
  - Underweight < 18.5 (e.g., 5’7: and 110 pounds)
  - Normal weight 18.5 - 24.9
  - Overweight 25 - 29.9
  - Obesity 30 or greater
Types of Eating Disorders

- Anorexia Nervosa
  - Restrictive
  - Binge/Purging
- Bulimia Nervosa
  - Often not physically apparent
- Binge Eating Disorder—this is new to DSM-5
- Overall, lower threshold; severity also assessed
- Rigidity in thinking, managing uncomfortable emotions, managing stress
Body Image

- Boys and girls, values
- Content analyses
- Body Image Likert Scale
- Role of media
  - Thin ideal internalization
  - Body dissatisfaction
Tools

● Compassion
  – Eating disorder symptoms have been in service of something
  – Would you be willing to trade in your eating disorder if it meant gaining five pounds
  – What have you lost due to your disorder

● Alternative coping solutions are needed

● Separate the eating disorder from the self; talk back

● Work to prioritize strengths & skills separate from physical appearance
Stress

• Definition
• Types of stressors
• How does stress get under the skin?
• Coping
Is anyone stressed?

- What does it feel like?
- What other types of things cause you stress?
What is stress?

• “a state of challenge or threat that disrupts the normal rhythm and balance of a person’s life” (Sanderson, 2004, p. 92)

• “an external load or demand on a biological, social, or psychological system” (Lazarus, 1993, p. 2)
"My work? It's been pretty stressful lately."
Stressors

• Various sources of stress
  – External (work, environment)
  – Internal (making a difficult choice)

• Daily hassles

• Stressful life events

• Chronic strain
  – “Risky families”: heightened sympathetic reactivity, exaggerated cortisol responses
  – Poverty, bad relationship, high-stress job, multiple roles, racism
How stress gets under the skin

- Fight/Flight response, central nervous system
- Cortisol is the vehicle
- Acute stress: cortisol serves as an anti-inflammatory agent
Why look at stress?

- Stress reactivity is important in the short term but causes impairment in long term
- People report greater frequency and severity of stress than ever before (APA, 2007)
- Chronic stress is related to psychological, immunological, and health problems such as high blood pressure
- Chronic stress is related to dysregulated eating
Role of stress

- How does stress get under the skin to influence eating patterns and weight?
Sapolsky’s work

• “Primates are super smart and organized just enough to devote their free time to being miserable to each other and stressing each other out…. But if you get chronically, psychosocially stressed, you’re going to compromise your health. So essentially, we’ve evolved to be smart enough to make ourselves sick.”

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_relieve_stress
When stressed, do you eat:

A. 

B. 

[Image of carrots]
When stressed, do you eat:

A. 

B. [Checked]
Stress and drive to eat

- Greater vulnerability to stress is associated with increased intake of high sugar high fat food
- Chronic strain and disinhibition; finding mirrored in laboratory paradigm
- High sugar foods and the limbic system
  - Dopaminergic effect, nucleus accumbens
Stress, Appraisal, and Coping

• Three kinds of stress
  – Harm: psychological damage that had already been done
  – Threat: anticipation of harm that has not yet taken place but may be imminent
  – Challenge: difficult demands that we feel confident about overcoming by deploying our coping resources

• Appraisal:
  – Cognitive mediator of stress reactions

• Coping
  – Altering circumstances, or how they are interpreted
  – Problem focused
  – Emotion focused
Coping

• Problem Focused
  – Address external circumstances
  – Factors must be controllable

• Emotion Focused
  – Decrease emotional and physiological arousal
Approaches that can be less healthy

• Avoidant emotion focused
  – Behavioral disengagement
  – Thought suppression
• Aggression
• Depressants (e.g., alcohol)
• Stimulants (e.g., cocaine; high sugar, high fat foods)
• Narcotic analgesics (e.g., heroin)
Impact of stress on health

- Sports injuries
- Migraines
- Headaches
- Eczema
- Hives
- Back pain
- Hernias
- Poor memory
- Immune system weakened
- Ulcers
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Colds and flu
- Arthritis
- Appendicitis
- Gastrointestinal disorders
- Herpes
- Asthma
Other ways to manage of stress

• Normalization
  – Other people are similarly stressed

• Tools
  – Social support
  – Mindfulness
  – Deep breathing
  – Visual imagery
  – Chunking projects
  – Esteemable acts
Helping your loved one

- Empower your family member
- Normalization
  - It makes sense, when this stressed, to turn to food
- Alternative strategies
  - How else have you managed uncomfortable emotions?
- Pause, look at emotional vs. physical hunger
  - Slow intake
  - Mindful eating
  - Esteemable acts
  - Re-calibrate metabolic rate and physiological cue awareness
Take home points

- An Eating Disorder is not always physically apparent
  - Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge-eating
- Stress is related to dysregulated eating, weight gain and other health conditions
- There are ways to manage uncomfortable emotions, stress, and eating disorder symptoms
Other resources

- **Websites**
  - National Eating Disorders Association: [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)
  - Something-fishy.org
  - Academy of Eating Disorders: Aedweb.org

- **Books**
  - *Help Your Teenager Beat an Eating Disorder*. James Lock & Daniel le Grange
Thank you!

Questions?