

Stress Management Summit

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Shaping the future of stress science: The experience from Greece

Chronic noncommunicable diseases (CNCs) have a major impact on both the individual and the society. Cardiovascular disease followed by cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes type 2, are the four main causes of morbidity and mortality in the modern world, and negative life style choices, such as an unhealthy diet, a sedentary life, and the abuse of tobacco and alcohol are key risk factors for all the aforementioned diseases. Interestingly, only recent has biomedical research highlighted the catalytic role of stress in the CNCs epidemic. Of course, people under stress, are less likely to comply with interventions aiming at a healthier life style while stress itself can be a triggering, permissive, and/or causal factor for most chronic diseases. Also, quite often adopting an unhealthy life style is a nonadaptational way to cope with stress. The psychoneuroendocrinology of stress is a fascinating, rapidly developing scientific field. The pertinent research has already yielded apt evidence of several neurohormonal mechanisms implicated in the pathogenesis of CNCs. Furthermore, brain imaging studies have disclosed the fundamental role of stress-related brain areas in lifestyle decision making and psychiatric or somatic diseases.

For the past 8 years, we have been running a postgraduate course entitled “The science of Stress and Health Promotion”. For the first time, a medical school program offers the opportunity to its students and the public to fully understand the concept of stress, in terms of neurophysiology and endocrinology, as well as the mechanisms and pathways through which stress impacts on health and disease. Students learn how to clinically assess and measure stress and to design and implement an effective stress management program in different populations and settings. Our research has shown that an effective stress management program entails fundamental aspects of daily living, such as diet, exercise, regularity of sleep and eating and several stress coping techniques. The program in over 40 published studies has shown the effectiveness of such an approach in reducing stress in children and adults and in people suffering from various diseases, such as depression, asthma, diabetes, breast cancer, multiple sclerosis, dementia, and obesity/metabolic syndrome, as well as in people with sleep quality problems, tobacco addiction, gambling, etc. We have recently implemented a holistic stress management intervention for essential hypertension. In this prospective two-armed study we found beneficial effects of stress management both for blood pressure control and lifestyle modifications.

Biography

Christina Darviri is Professor of Prevention and Health Promotion. Since 2008, she has been serving as the co-Scientific director with professor G.Chrousos of the MSc/PhD Program entitled “The Science of Stress and Health Promotion” at the Medical School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece. She lectures on stress-related nosology, lifestyle and stress, efficient stress management and the overall connection between stress and health promotion. She has published over 50 peer-reviewed articles in the field of stress. She has also supervised over 100 theses on stress, health and disease and published many books. She has been the principal investigator of many research projects, focusing on issues such as healthy longevity and how life style impacts stress resilience, as well as how to effectively auto regulate hypertension through stress management and health promotion. Her latest scientific project is a technique called “Pythagorean Self-awareness for Stress Management, Memory Improvement and Sense of Well-being”.

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