Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes

Many health professionals have underestimated the importance of therapeutic lifestyle changes (TLCs) in assisting with mental, physical, and emotional problems. As therapists and psychiatrists are being pushed to offer quick solutions (e.g., prescribing medication), lifestyle treatments are being underutilized more than ever before. TLCs not only have less negative side effects than both psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy, they also have the ability to assist in a person's overall health, well-being, and even with their friends and families. There are eight generalized TLCs that will be discussed including exercise and diet, nature, relationships, recreational activities, relaxation/stress management, religious/spiritual engagement, and service to others.

Exercise and Diet

Exercise offers an easy and accessible method for aiding both physical and psychiatric problems. Just a few of the well-known benefits of exercise include reducing the risk of depression, cutting the severity and effect of dementia (for some, as large as 45%), and aiding with executive functions such as planning and coordination. In terms of a healthy diet, TLCs incorporate multicolored fruits and vegetables, fish, and reducing excess calories. This type of diet has been shown to help individuals of all ages. For children, it can strengthen academic and perceptive thinking; for adults, it can reduce the risk of age-related decline due to illnesses such as Parkinson and Alzheimer's. Additionally, food supplements, particularly Vitamin D, folic acid, SAME (S-adenosyl-methionine), and fish oils, have been proven to be therapeutically beneficial. Of utmost importance are fish oils. They produce essential omega-3 acids, shown to aid with affective disorders, depression, schizophrenic disorders, cognitive abilities, and protecting our body systems.

Nature

While we are increasingly spending more of our time in artificial environments, we are experiencing a multitude of problems, including disrupted sleep and short-term deficiency. While there are certain benefits to this increase in digital media and technology, the negative effects are creating disorders of attention, cognition, overload, addiction, and a disconnection from reality. Immersion in nature can have numerous benefits in counteracting these issues. These are found in both physical and psychological areas. For example, the silence offered from nature can help aid with daily problems such as sleep difficulties, along with severe illnesses such as cardiovascular disease.

Relationships

It is common knowledge that positive relationships are essential in having good mental and physical wellness. They reduce health risks and can increase mental traits such as happiness and resilience. Most people require some level of mutual dependence. However, we are living in a period when social isolation is increasing, from both friends and families. This has caused threats to our overall well-being, as well as having severed connections within our community and networks. Thus, the importance of improving the number and quality of relationships is vital to healthy lifestyles.
**Recreational Activities**

Recreational activities are essential components to healthy lifestyles, and thus are important TLCs. Simple recreations, such as play, humor, art, playfulness, and other aesthetic pleasures, can go a long way in improving well-being. Some of the benefits from recreational activities include reduced defensiveness, maturity in children, mood enhancement, immune system support, and stress management. If used with other TLCs such as exercise and a nutritious diet, recreation can undoubtedly help maintain strong psychological and physical health.

**Relaxation/ Stress Management**

Chronic stress is no stranger to Americans today, yet many people commonly take on unnecessarily stressful activities, often due to influence from media and other outlets. Stress can lead to multiple problems all across our bodies and minds, hurting us even from a standpoint of brain chemistry. Skills targeted at managing stress include multiple approaches. Psychological approaches incorporate self-hypnosis and guided imagery, while somatic techniques include tai chi, qui gong, and muscle relaxation exercises. These muscle relaxation skills have been known to help treat anxiety disorders, found among those with chronic stress. Contemplative approaches consist of yoga and meditation, with studies showing a wider range of effects for meditation than any other psychotherapy. These studies have also shown an ability to reduce stress in clinical populations, as well as improvement in psychological capabilities, maturity, empathy, emotional stability, and cognition.

**Religious and Spiritual Involvement**

About 90% of the world population engages in some religious or spiritual practice. Studies have shown various health benefits arising from these practices, including improvement in psychological, relational, and even marital related issues. Additionally, the studies have described overall reduction in anxiety, substance abuse, depression, and suicide rates. These spiritual practices, however, are found to be most beneficial when they focus on ideas such as love and forgiveness rather than guilt or punishment. Using these practices for TLCs require an investigation of key issues and development, and an examination of where involvement can be most valuable to the patient.

**Service**

Contribution and service to others have been shown to foster altruism. Altruistic actions have shown to be associated with a decrease in negative mental traits such as greed and envy, while developing healthy mental qualities such as happiness. Many studies show not only an increase in psychological benefits, but physical ones as well, with some verifying longer lives. Some cases indicate the ability of individuals to heal others through their own experiences, and can thus heal themselves as well. Exceptions to these benefits occur in cases where service is done due to obligation, duty, or pressure, and when burnout occurs through overwhelmed caretakers. Overall, these TLCs can improve well-beings socially, mentally, and physically for those of all ages. Some studies have even gone as far as to recommend that services created to support individuals may need to be reversed so that the individuals can see what they can do to help others.