On Stress: Thoughts from Mark & Mia Moyad

hy do you go to the annual PCRI Conference? I have asked this question countless times and I have probably heard 136 fabulous different reasons. "Need more solutions for my advanced prostate cancer," "hear about the latest and greatest treatments," "compare side effects of treatment," "solutions for minor and major side effects of treatment," "what supplements to take or avoid," "how to change my diet," "want to see Moyad's beautiful face and physique" (okay I made that last one up)... Whatever your reason, there are countless individuals and couples that come up to me during and after the conference that tell me one of the most unexpected reasons they would recommend this conference is simply for stress reduction. What is Moyad talking about? Yes, the PCRI Conference is a community or a village of people coming together to share the latest thoughts and ideas on how to deal with prostate cancer. And this, my friends, provides the ultimate calming effect;

not only meeting others like you but also empowering each other with more knowledge and friendships and ultimately more solutions and peace of mind. So, in honor of one of the many surprise benefits of this conference, and all the break-out sessions that can provide information and stress alleviation, I thought it would be a good time to hear from my best friend who helps people every day who are dealing with some type of stress. She has great advice on how to reduce or eliminate it. A little stress now and then is not such a bad thing, but it is the chronic stress that can be physically and mentally unhealthy and anything that we can do in order to eliminate it including reading the next column or attending the PCRI annual Conference, especially the personalized breakout sessions on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, could change your life in an unexpected and wonderful way. However, if you still just attend the conference to see my face and Schwarzenegger-like physique (not now but when he was 25 years old) then that is okay too!

t has become almost cliché today to give the perception—realistic or not—that we are overscheduled and over-worked. When did this become our badge of honor—as if chronic stress should be revered? It appears many of us would rather be seen accomplishing a long laundry list rather than caught on a hammock, or God forbid napping. Have we convinced ourselves our busyness defines us and exemplifies our worth? What if this cycle of chronic stress is not only unhealthy but not to be admired? When was the last time you actually did lay in a hammock or found a personalized equivalent? Allow me to convince you that it is okay—permission granted—to do it differently even if it is just temporarily.

If we think about the stressors in our lives and how they can be better managed, its best if we start small, strive for a stress-free day. It is a small, realistic, and specific goal rather than a broad goal such as seeking 'less stress' in your life. We aren't aiming for a stress-free week or month, just one simple little day. We really only have the power to control this moment to the best of our ability, no more, no less, so how about aiming for enjoying this moment, this hour, and this day. Let's explore some options.

First, we have to allow ourselves permission to live a higher quality of life with less stress and anxiety. We all have stress triggers, most of us can identify several; you could probably list 10 right now off

the top of your head, but how about peace prompters? Can you identify 5 to 10 ways that can cue yourself towards this peace? The idea is to identify and incorporate sensory cues that give your mind and body permission to slow down and relax.

For me, I am very deliberate about spending time in my garden. That is the first place I go in the morning and my stress-free sanctuary at the end of my day. There I experience stimulation of all 5 senses: The sweet smell of the dewy earth mixed with fresh lavender, lilacs and honeysuckle, the warm gentle breeze on my skin, the soothing songs of the birds and wind chimes, the soft silkiness of a rose petal, and even a sweet

juicy tomato in season. These all take me to a place of rest and relaxation.

Since I can't always be in my garden, I like to keep other visual cues that prompt me to feel relaxed: Calming words or quotations that speak to my

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Mia has facilitated several support groups including cancer support groups at University of Michigan Health System, The Wellness Center, women's support groups at Southeastern Michigan Women's Center, Packard Health. Mia is passionate about spirituality, healthy-living, family, friends and her community. heart such as art, photos of loved ones, fresh flowers, or soft lighting. All of this subconsciously helps me to manage my stress. What can serve as your own personal peace prompters?

Another opportunity for stress management is paced respiration. Deep and controlled breathing has been shown to help reduce blood pressure temporarily [1]. The mindful act of deep breathing acts as our reset button with just 3 deep cleansing breaths. I like to follow it up with an indulgent stretch as this accentuates the stress reduction intrinsically and extrinsically. Reset, permission granted.

Finally, I love to incorporate exercise into my day. The endless past and current research on endorphins, "the runner's high," and improved immune enhancement released during exercise is enough to validate this point, but you really need to experience it and live it to appreciate it [2].

Consider your intrinsic motivators, what drives you internally to achieve better health and reduced chronic stress. Think about what you're looking forward to; meeting up with an old friend, spending time with the grandkids, maybe a family reunion. Seek your inner motivation, your epiphany, and claim it. Permission granted.

When considering external motivators, do whatever it takes: buy a dog, find a friend to help encourage you, close the curtains, blast the stereo, and dance yourself to a happy place. In closing, remember that gratitude is a great way to stay connected to serenity. If we can be mindful of all of life's blessings big and small, we can help keep stress in its place. Dare to believe that you can be joyful in knowing that you can live a life of less stress regardless of your situation. Thrive despite your circumstances, your past does not define you, today does not define you, a medical report does not define you, you define you. Claim your joy. Permission granted.

Below I've created a list of free or affordable peace prompters for you to consider, seize the day with these or create your own:

- Go bowling
- Stroll the local farmers market and treat yourself to a fresh bouquet of flowers
- Take a dance class
- Create a meditation nook in your home, a soft blanket, pillow, a candle, a favorite prayer, or calming photos on the wall
- Revel in some bird watching
- · Journal, release anything that's weighing heavily on your heart and mind or record your daily gratitude
- Write a handwritten letter to someone you love or admire, enclose a memento or photo
- Paint one wall in your home a calming color that says "ahhhhhh"
- · Read a good book, or re-read an old favorite
- Take yourself on a date, get lost in a bookstore, go to a paper store and buy yourself a new journal or stationery, and treat yourself to an ice cream cone
- Attend a religious service, the *Journal of Economic Psychology* showed a direct correlation between attending religious service, and feeling more content
- Give a heartfelt kiss or hug to a loved one.

references online at PCRI.org