

# COVENANT

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## The Benefits of Physical Activity on our Spiritual Well-being and Mental Health

By Nadine Crescenzi, Certified WaterArt Instructor, Aquatic Rehab Specialist, Land Instructor

*“Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it, I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.” Jeremiah 33:6*



We all know the importance of physical activity and the beneficial impact it has on our body. However, it is important to acknowledge the positive effect it has on our spirit, well-being, and mental health. Studies have proven that 20 minutes of exercise facilitates memory

functions, improves decision making and higher learning, and prevents degeneration of our bodies. Being active releases endorphins, which enhance feelings of happiness and positivity. The brain releases chemicals that respond to stress and mental tension, helping to alleviate symptoms of depression, anxiety and panic.

Our brain processes all pleasure in the same way. With addictions, whether it be alcohol, drugs, food, spending, internet etc., a surge of dopamine stimulates our pleasure centre—nucleus accumbens. In persons with addictions, dopamine is released at a much higher level than normal creating a feeling of reward in the brain. When we exercise our brain releases dopamine, giving us a positive reward. This is beneficial in addiction recovery and in coping with daily life.

Physical activity also helps with sleep. Exercise raises our body's core temperature. As our body temperature returns to normal over the course of a few hours, it tells our body that it is time to rest. Increased activity keeps energy levels up making us more productive during the day. Ultimately, being active makes us feel better about ourselves, improves our confidence and boosts our self-esteem.

Water fitness is a gentle, low impact environment for physical activity. Movement in water is fluid and can be performed with ease providing less stress on the body and joints. The water's buoyancy works against gravity, supporting the body, improving flexibility and removing the high impact of land training. This is especially beneficial for people who suffer mobility issues or find weight-bearing activities painful or difficult on land. Movement in the water allows greater range of motion without joint pain and reduces the risk of injury. The resistance of water is beneficial for building and regaining muscular strength and flexibility. Water-based exercise can help people with chronic diseases, injuries and mobility issues improve

the use of affected muscles and joints, decreasing pain while improving flexibility and strength. Other benefits of regular water activity include: decreased swelling, increased circulation, increased lung capacity, regulated blood sugar levels, improved cardiac function, stabilized bone density, reduced scar formation in tissue and increased energy levels.

Breathing is an involuntary process. We take approximately 20,000 breaths a day. The autonomic nervous system is a control system that acts unconsciously regulating our respiratory rate, heart rate, digestion and pupillary response. The sympathetic nervous system is the primary control of our fight-or-flight response. When adrenaline is released, it stimulates an instinctive response from our system, and our breathing becomes rapid, our heart rate increases, our pupils dilate, our blood pressure rises, and our body temperature may increase. Controlled breathing engages the parasympathetic nervous system, which counteracts the fight-or-flight response. By voluntarily changing our breathing we decrease activity in the neural circuit—the brain's breathing pacemaker. Studies have shown that controlled breathing has a powerful effect on our brain's response system, reducing our blood pressure, heart rate and stress level. It also increases memory and regulates emotions, oxygen levels, immune resiliency, energy, relaxation, focus, positivity, and greater physical, spiritual and mental health.

In my role as Fitness and Aquafit Instructor at Southdown, I have the following goals:

- To transcend basic knowledge of exercise and explore its impact on spiritual well-being and mental health.
- To guide participants in their exploration of an array of physical activities that align with their personal needs and abilities through group and individual instruction.
- To design and provide individuals with tools to manage stress and anxiety, to build self-esteem and confidence.
- To assist each person in setting goals for continued physical activity after they leave Southdown.

My greatest reward as a Fitness Instructor is knowing that women and men are leaving Southdown physically and emotionally stronger, with the tools to continue to improve their physical and spiritual well-being. ■

# Managing Stress the Healthy Way!

By Amy Torch, RD CDE



Optimal nutrition, adequate sleep and mindfulness are the foundation for improving and maintaining a stress-free lifestyle. When people are exposed to increased stress, the nervous system and adrenal gland send signals to the body to help us cope, think responsibly and get our mind ready to respond physically. This action is known as fight-or-flight

which is our basic instinct response. In addition, stress can be a result of many factors occurring in our lives from serious to minor stressors to which our body responds similarly. This response can lead to poor digestion, nausea and a general feeling of illness, which in turn can lead to stress.

Healthy and balanced eating begins with consuming small portions throughout the day to increase metabolic rate and most importantly ensuring that the day starts off with a healthy breakfast. This will help prevent blood sugar spikes and crashes, and promote stability in blood sugar levels leading to fewer cravings, hunger urges and minimized stress.

It is important to remember that the quality of foods (high fibre, Low Glycemic Index), the appropriate quantity (Canada's Food Guide portions) and consistency of meals (eating every 3-5 hours) all play an equal role in successful stress management.

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Studies have shown that long-term stress is linked to the body's storage of fat around the midsection due to an increase of the cortisol hormone. Cortisol is released when there is a feeling of physical or psychological stress. Therefore, the management of stress and overall health can mitigate these weight challenges. Mindfulness and awareness of stressors and how the body responds can lead to positive stress management.

The most common outcomes of high stress are increased cravings for "comfort foods," increased appetite and decreased metabolic rate. However, choosing a healthy and balanced diet, proper portion control and adequate nutritive intake can promote optimal stress management.

Specific vitamins and minerals play a role in increasing energy and decreasing stress:

- **Vitamin B** promotes an increase of needed energy after stressful events. Food sources: banana, avocado, nuts and seeds, fish, dairy and leafy greens.
- **Vitamin C** is essential for adrenal gland and for the body to cope with stress. Food sources: citrus fruits, tomatoes, peppers, kiwi, leafy greens and broccoli.
- **Magnesium** helps to decrease anxiety and relax muscles. Food sources: Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, peanuts, leafy greens, oats, brown rice and beans.

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Some foods and stimulants have a negative effect on stress management:

- **Caffeine:** Excess amounts of caffeine can affect sleep. Adequate sleep (8 hours) is important to manage stress hormones and reduce overall stress. Decaffeinated teas, herbal teas and green teas loaded with antioxidants instead of regular caffeinated coffee and tea are a great choice. Sugary pop/sodas/cole and caffeinated drinks can be replaced with sparkling waters. Caffeine stays in the human body for up to 6 hours so it is essential to avoid it after 3 pm to promote optimal sleep.
- **Sugar, salt, alcohol and nicotine:** These four items in excess are not part of a healthy diet as they can decrease absorption of essential nutrients among many other side effects.

Exercise (yoga, tai chi, swimming, cardio and meditation), proper diet, lifestyle, and adequate sleep will help make us feel more positive about ourselves, improve our vitality and well-being and promote optimal management of stressful triggers while maintaining a healthy weight. ■

**Reference:**

- Dietitians of Canada, PEN: Practice-based Evidence in Nutrition, 2014-2016
- [www.health.clevelandclinic.org](http://www.health.clevelandclinic.org)
- The Canadian Diabetes Association Clinical Practice Guidelines, 2017

**Proper sleep, mindful eating, socialization and an active lifestyle are essential for stress management and a promising healthy future.**

## Reducing Stress Through Mindful Movement

By Nicole Aylwin, MA, Certified Yoga Instructor

**“No mind without mindfulness.”**

**- Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD**



When did being “busy and stressed” become normal? Between work that follows us home, our family commitments and commitments to our community, stress has become a low-level hum in the background of our lives.

Recognizing the importance of the relationship between chronic stress, the mind and the body is why Southdown offers a weekly mindful movement class to the residents. Mindful movement is the practice of progressing slowly through a series of physical movements while placing the full focus and attention on the breath. Mindful movement has been shown to be successful in helping reduce stress, calm the mind and relax the body. As we focus on our inhalations and exhalations and match our movements to the rhythm of the breath, we can tune into what is happening in the body at that moment instead of letting the mind wander through past scenarios or invent future ones. Being in the moment and focusing on our body and breath helps calm the nervous system and makes way for new thinking patterns to develop. Put differently: mindful movement helps us jump off the “mental hamster wheel.”

Stress is often described as a psychological issue: the experience of mental or emotional strain caused by facing a difficult situation. But this description does not tell the whole story. Stress does not simply live in our mind – it lives in our body. Think about how you experience stress. Is it as a tension headache? A clenched jaw? Shallow breathing? An upset stomach? Insomnia? Stress is mental and emotional, but it is also physical.

The relationship between stress, the mind and the body is complex. When we experience stress, whether it is caused by an encounter with our supervisor, a family situation, or a traffic jam, our body reacts by activating our nervous system’s fight-or-flight response. When this happens, we feel the effects immediately: adrenaline is pumped into our system, our heart rate increases and blood flows to our muscles. In short: our mind recognizes a threat (i.e. stressor) and our body reacts. Once the threat/stress have passed, our nervous system returns to normal, and regular functions such as digestion and cell repair resume.

The fight-or-flight response is meant to be temporary. The release of stress hormones that help us fight or flee is intended to diminish once the threat has passed. When we experience chronic stress, and our minds are constantly under mental and emotional strain, our bodies never get a break and a chance to repair, and our immune system weakens. This is why long-term stress manifests not only in the decline of the mind but also in the breakdown of the body. As psychiatrist Bessel Van Der Kolk reminds us: "the body keeps the score."

Since the body has equal responsibility for creating, holding, and diminishing stress, trying to tackle stress by dealing only with the mind can be compared to solving a puzzle without half the pieces. Incorporating mindful movement into the treatment plan for women and men dealing with chronic stress and other mental health challenges is just one of the ways Southdown recognizes the importance of holistically addressing residents' needs.

The real beauty of mindful movement is that anyone can do it just about anywhere. Please take a moment and ...

- Sit up tall in your chair.
- Take a slow deep breath in through your nose and out through your nose.
- Make your breath long and smooth.
- Now inhale and raise both of your arms over your head for a count of six.
- Finish raising your arms as you finish your inhale.
- Slowly breathe out lowering your arms for a count of six.
- Repeat two more times.

Now, ask yourself: how do you feel? Then, consider mindful movement to be a part of your daily life. ■



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Toronto, ON M5E 1W2 Canada

Group rate : \$199 CAD (plus taxes)  
(group name: Southdown)

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**Registration Form**

Please fill out this form and mail it to:

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Total number of participants:.....

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Last Name ..... Init.....

Title:.....

Mailing Address .....

.....

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**PAYMENT**

- Before August 6:  
\$350 CAD / \$275 USD (p.p.)

- After August 6:  
\$380 CAD / \$300 USD (p.p.)

- 10% group discount for 3 or more delegates

Total payment:  CAD or  USD

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October 22-24 2018

## Critical Personnel Issues Conference

TORONTO

MOVING FORWARD WITH  
WISDOM: SKILLS AND TOOLS FOR  
INTERVENTION

An intervention is an action performed to empower and motivate others to make changes in their lives. These changes may include activities intended to modify behaviours and emotional states. A wide range of intervention strategies exist for various behavioural, emotional and relational issues. The conference will explore intervention warning signs and offer practical skills and tools. The conference is designed for Leadership Teams, Formation and Vocation Directors, Vicars, Rectors, Pastors, Canons, Personnel Directors and Supervisors.

### Conference Registration Options:

- Tel: 905-727-4214 ext. 104
- Email: [events@southdown.on.ca](mailto:events@southdown.on.ca)
- Online: [www.southdown.on.ca](http://www.southdown.on.ca)
- Mail: fill out the form on reverse and mail it with payment



### FROM MY DESK TO YOURS:

Greetings from the Northern Hemisphere, where we are in the midst of summer! And greetings to the Southern Hemisphere where winter has arrived.

Each season has its own physical and emotional shift for us. It seems that summertime brings a burst of new energy for everyone. Summer brings the promise of a different pace with more outside relaxation activities and the opportunity for renewing our energy. However, to those who may be reading this in their wintertime, with increasing hours of darkness and decreasing hours of sunlight, keeping up "summertime" spirit during the winter season may prove difficult, when rather, it is a critical necessity. In this edition of *Covenant*, articles are perfectly timed to address the importance of our physical care and how it impacts not only our physical health, but also our mental and spiritual well-being.

*Legacy and Hope* was the theme of our Annual Benefit Dinner in May. Sr. Marie Zarowny, SA addressed the attendees on the importance of mission and service as witnessed through the Sisters of St. Ann in their fearless relocation from Quebec to British Columbia prior to the construction of the transcontinental railway. Their dedication and commitment to serving those in need of education and healthcare has left an enduring legacy for generations to come. Sr. Marie offered Southdown a challenge to continue to find ways to support those ministers in our most remote regions where services are limited. We also took this opportunity to recognize the 50 years of contribution Mark O'Regan has made to Southdown. Mark, a member of the Emmanuel Convalescent Board of Directors, recalled his earliest years as a volunteer in the finance office. His devotion to our mission and vision is evident through his years of support in time and talent. We are grateful for his dedication and love for those in ministry.

In October we will host the **Critical Personnel Issues Conference** in Toronto. We will offer strategies for intervention and post intervention self-care. We frequently receive requests for tips or skills for how to address concern with community members, colleagues, or for those for whom they are responsible. Interventions are never easy but they are the most loving and caring thing one can offer to someone we hold dear. There are many different types of intervention and many different situations that call for an intervention. This conference is designed to include interactive experiences and opportunities for conversation. This is not a "one size fits all" but rather a conference that will address the unique qualities necessary to invite someone to personal growth.

*"You are sent into this world to believe in yourself as God's chosen one and then to help your brothers and sisters know that they also are beloved sons and daughters of God who belong together."*

Henri J.M. Nouwen

Wishing you a Blessed season,

Dorothy Heiderscheit, OSF, MSW, ACSW, RSW  
CEO, Southdown

# We've Got Your Back

By Dr. Trevor Morrison, DC, BSC



As a member of the health and wellness team at Southdown, my role as Chiropractor is to reduce pain and inflammation and restore joint and muscle mobility for the residents. The care may include short-term goals in response to an acute or previously untreated condition or the continuation of an existing treatment plan that was in effect prior to coming to Southdown.

As we age, prolonged sitting or standing, poor posture, repetitive movement, past injuries, lack of sleep, and age-related degeneration take a toll on our bodies. The impact may be sudden but often progresses slowly over time. In my experience at Southdown, I have noted that the generous and giving nature of women and men in religious life often puts them at risk of not being bio-aware. Bio-awareness is the ability to be aware of the changes in our bodies. Studies have shown that headaches, neck and back pain, muscle tightness and joint rigidity are often manifestations of stress, depression and anxiety.

A study that was designed to test the correlation between chiropractic care and its impact on mental health was published in the Journal of Upper Cervical Chiropractic Research in 2013. The study cited prior research that showed of the 2818 patients undergoing chiropractic care in addition to other modalities of mental health treatment, 76% reported an improvement in their mental/emotional health. Similar findings have also been reported in the American Journal of Psychiatry. Mental health issues impact our minds, bodies as well as our souls.

As a chiropractor, my role is to diagnose and treat any areas of pain, which involve muscles, joints and or nerves. Chiropractic care goes beyond the neck and back. It includes assessment and treatment of all areas including feet, ankles, knees, hips, pelvis, shoulders, elbows and wrists as well. The initial assessment includes a discussion of the presenting issues, a physical evaluation that includes the use of

specific orthopaedic tests of the muscles, joints and nerves related to the affected structures. Based on the information and results of the testing, a diagnosis is made. The diagnosis and the types of treatments available are discussed with the resident and together we decide how to best approach their individualized treatment plan.

Treatment may include:

- Manual procedures including joint manipulations and adjustments
- Soft tissue and reflex techniques
- Exercise, stretches
- Application of heat, cold, trans-electrical neural stimulation (TENS)
- Acupuncture
- Graston (a technique to break up fascial restrictions, scar tissue adhesions and detect areas of chronic inflammation and or fibrosis)
- Education on spinal health, posture and lifestyle modifications
- Other supportive measures including the use of back supports and orthotics
- Recognition of the limitations of chiropractic care and the need for referral to other health professionals

In addition, exercise and fitness are integral components of the modalities at Southdown. The body may respond to these new and different exercises and elicit soreness and stiffness. The passive manual treatments offered through chiropractic care often help residents to continue with their wellness goals. It is important to learn to be mindful of our bodies and become bio-aware. Our bodies are the earthly structures that God designed and gave us. Take a moment throughout the day to listen and tend to them with a light stretch, exercise, sip of water and if necessary to recognize and seek help from someone. This will help to remove any physical distractions that may impede our personal wellness journey and from giving and helping others. ■

**Covenant** is produced and published by The Southdown Institute. Its purpose is to inform and educate the readership about clinical issues that surface in our work and to invite integration of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.



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