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How to Handle Stress

Joanna Chodorowska

Pat: Hi, this is Pat Iyer with Legal Nurse Podcast, and today we're going to talk about something that affects everyone who's listening. That is how you manage stress, both in your own life and how you see the impact of stress when people are injured.

I have with me a person who is a holistic nutrition therapy coach. She's an author, she's a speaker, she's a minister, and she's a competitive triathlete. She helps to uncover the root cause of your symptoms, usually caused by stress, which can be physical in nature. It can also include emotional, mental or spiritual imbalances as well. Through intuitive nutrition, the path to heal energy work and her 16-plus years of experience, Joanna Chodorowska helps fuel your fun and fulfillment by restoring your balance of your body, mind and soul.

Joanna and I met earlier this year when we were both at a conference and we were in a think tank focusing on our businesses. And when I heard about her special niche associated with stress and managing stress, I thought I'd bring her to you so that you can hear what she has to say. Joanna, I'm so pleased that you're with me today.

Joanna: I am so pleased that you invited me to be on the podcast with you.

Pat: Let's start off by thinking about what the common symptoms are when you are overstressed. We know we can get stressed, but let's talk about *overstressed*.

Joanna: Yeah. And overstressed could be intense amount of stress, or it could be long-term chronic stress. And typically, when you're overwhelmed, your digestion slows down. You're tired. You're sometimes wired and tired. Most of the time you're flying by the seat of your pants in terms of what you're going to be eating, and sometimes you don't eat. But the most common symptom of overtired or over stress is GI distress and just extreme fatigue and feeling unmotivated.

Pat: I remember when my father was dying, and I was having symptoms that I didn't recognize as stress. They were irritable bowel syndrome.

Joanna: Yeah, that's the GI distress.

Pat: Yes, and one of my physicians said, "Pat, you're a gut reactor," and I thought, "I've never heard that expression before," but that makes sense if you have GI reactions to stress.

Joanna: That is one way of looking at it. But when you're looking at the stress cycle typically when you're stressed, it's like that fight or flight mode. Digestion is not a crucial element. It's not something that's going to help you survive in that moment, so digestion slows down. Then the digestion slows down, what you choose typically changes as well, and it's not typically nutrient-dense foods that will counteract the stress. It's typically comfort foods, which increase the imbalance.

Now you've got the stress, which is slowing the digestion or impairing the digestion. Then you have the stress that is creating an imbalance in the gut flora. And then continue it on, and it just eventually will become IBS or GI distress that surprises you because you think, "I've eaten this all the time." We've created an imbalance in the gut, which I call a fire in the intestinal tract. It's about trying to identify what are the other things that are contributing to it because we must help you minimize the stress or change the way you react to the stress. But we must now correct this imbalance

Pat: And we are all delicately balanced organisms.

Joanna: Isn't everything trying too? The whole body and the whole universe are trying to find homeostasis on a regular basis. So, if it's going to be off here, then it must show up off someplace else to balance the equation. When you're stressed, you end up being a gut reactor. Things are happening and digesting, but they're not really doing it the right way because it all started with how we consume the food, how we're digesting the food. And under stress, we're not digesting the food, and we're creating that disruption in the gut.

Pat: Let's talk about the emotional and mental effects of stress. What have you seen in your practice?



Joanna: I think the biggest thing was the emotional and the mental stress is because it's been so long. We work hard at being strong and then we find that the body is not keeping up with this strength. It's starting to fall apart and weaken. Then it's like, "Who am I? I'm not who I think I am." Suddenly the emotional part is you have this belief of weakness because the body is breaking down, and you've basically had one thing too many on your plate.

It's like the straw that broke the camel's back. You just put too many things there, and we now must just find that balance of what we're doing for ourselves, as well as what we're doing for other people. That stress, the emotional one is, "Who am I and how did I get here? What's going on because my body just isn't what I think it's supposed to be?"

Pat: I was in a Mastermind not two hours ago, and one of the people in the group said, "I'm trying to do three things at once, and I'm not doing any of them well. And I've lost my ability to figure out what I should be doing. Here are my three activities. Help me figure out what is my priority." She said, "I just can't think my way through this."

Joanna: Yeah and that's part of that stress. It's the overwhelm. You just don't know where to begin because you used to be Wonder Woman, and I'm talking about women specifically, that they can do anything and everything. But when we get to that overwhelm, then the simplest task becomes an impossibility.

I know I had adrenal exhaustion 20 years ago. Talk about overwhelm. And I'm going to use myself as that example where I had built my whole world around athleticism, and I had done the Iron Man, which is quite the long event. And I, five months later, am having a hard time walking to the mailbox and back without needing to take a nap. Mentally, I'm saying, "If I don't mind, it doesn't matter. I can just keep going." And that's where you know the stress is like, "Okay, I can just keep going," but I was eating the wrong foods. I was not nourishing myself the way that I needed to. My body started to break down, and I ignored it because I got all this stuff I must do.

I just kept going. But when I had that adrenal exhaustion diagnosis, I'm now, "Wait, I'm not an athlete. What am I? Who am I?" And it was really quite a depression that I went through because I suddenly



had created this whole life, "Oh wait, that's not me. I guess that was smoke and mirrors." I had to really get in touch with who I was and say, "Okay, what really makes me happy? What really do I need to do to feed my soul?"

But also, I was working with another nutritionist who helped me include the foods that would help to rebuild the nutrient deficiency. I had to learn balance on so many different levels and that is the reason why I became a nutritionist myself, because you need to find that balance, the mental, spiritual, emotional and the physical. Typically, it's the physical that's the easiest to work on first.

Pat: I think we've highlighted some of the negative effects of stress. Can stress be positive for you?

Joanna: Absolutely. Stress is the thing that sometimes it's like, okay, if it's a little hard, it creates some stress. But when you can push through that, it gives you motivation. It can be a good thing and we adapt. If we don't have some stresses, then we don't adapt, then we just become, I almost want to say we've become *unbeings* because we're not actually living. We're just slugs. You know what I mean.

We need a little bit of stress in order to adapt and help the body to become better on not just the physical level but on a physical level, stronger physically, mentally and emotionally. And that stronger isn't always strong, tough. Strong is exposing the vulnerability and exposing the emotional aspects and telling people how you really feel and being able to ask for help. You do need some stress, but it's about managing that stress so that it doesn't become a stress that will deplete you.

Pat: For the people who are listening to this podcast, as we were talking before we started the show, we encounter people who go through enormous stress as a result of an injury. And assuming they survive, a personal injury or product liability case or a workers' comp injury, they can experience huge stress because of changes in their lifestyle, changes in their role, pain management, losing their occupation. It's particularly hard for men because they are used to assuming a certain role within a family and may not be able to play with the kids, take care of the house, cut the grass, be the provider.



Can you highlight for us, keeping that in mind, what are the different kinds of stress that we can experience?

Joanna: There's the stresses that are the emotional stresses, how you react to certain situations, how you react to people's comments about you or about something that you did. These are some of the mental and emotional stresses that we have. Then of course, there's the physical stress, which is how you eat, how you move, how you don't move, or how you don't sleep. Those are different kinds of stresses.

But there's also chemical stress, which is either the stress from the chemicals that you breathe in and the environment that you're in. Let's say you're doing construction work or work outside. You've got the pollutants, and that's a chemical stress, but there are also chemicals from foods that you eat. So, that's also another one.

Environmental stress: it could be just what's the energy of the space that you're in. Is it a negative energy or is it a positive energy? Are people uplifting or are they constantly berating? That's an environmental stress.

These are all stresses. Those teeny little adrenal glands that are about this big, and they're sitting on top of your kidneys, don't differentiate between any of these stresses. It's stress, and it can just build one on top of the other. And loss is another one that is a stressor. You lose your identity, lose your income, lose your friends, lose your ability to do a bunch of things that you thought were about you. Those become layers of stress that just keep adding on top of each other.

Pat: Another framework in which we experience stress is as independent business owners in close contact with attorneys who are handling high risk, high stakes litigation. There's a tremendous amount of money involved in lawsuits. The estimate I've seen is it can cost as much as \$150,000 for a plaintiff attorney to bring a medical malpractice case to the point of trial and then it escalates even more.

As a business owner, we can experience that stress in our day-to-day interactions with our clients, the vast majority of whom are pleasant people. But then there are those few, and I'm sure you've had them in your life Joanna, that the phone rings and you think, "Oh no, I really don't want to talk to a person. I don't."

Joanna: "Do I answer the phone?" That's when voicemail is best, right?

Pat: Right, if you have that luxury, but often you don't.

Joanna: Right.

Pat: Let's say we're talking to a business owner who's experiencing that stress in the business, and then it's lunchtime and that business owner's heading to get something to eat. Tell us about how nutrition interplays with handling stress like that.

Joanna: This is another case of a stressful situation and some people will be running away from the situation or trying to recover. So, they'll choose foods to help them cope. Most of the time it's going to be something very carb like, pasta, for example, because that's very comforting, and it helps you feel more love and more comfort. Another one is also like hoagies and the big bread, soft bread. It's very comforting. The challenge there on a nutrition level and on an energetic level: Those are coping foods, but they're feeding the imbalance in the gut.

When you're trying to have the balance in the gut, there are the good bacteria, the not so good bacteria, and they're all supposed to just have a nice little party breaking down foods for you. But when we're stressed, the good is not as strong as the not so good bacteria. And then if we eat more of those bread-like products and more sugar, because a lot of times cookies are a great comfort for stress, then we feed the healthier bacteria and the good starts to diminish. That's where that imbalance starts to happen in the gut.

Does that make sense?

Pat: It does. There's a reason why macaroni and cheese, and mashed potatoes, and French fries all have something in common.

Joanna: Absolutely. They are taking care of an emotion that you have, whether it's a resentment, whether it's frustration, whether it's overwhelm. Whether it's sometimes even in these cases where you have this difficult client, you feel challenged and sometimes even incapable like, "How do I... did I deal with that right?" and you start second guessing whether the conversation was actually the appropriate one or



not. So, all these foods are in basically taking care of that stress in that moment, but they're feeding the amounts.

Before we continue with the show, I want to share a source of great information about stress management. I talk to too many LNCs who work all the time, are exhausted, and afraid of getting burned out.

I need to ask *you* a few questions.

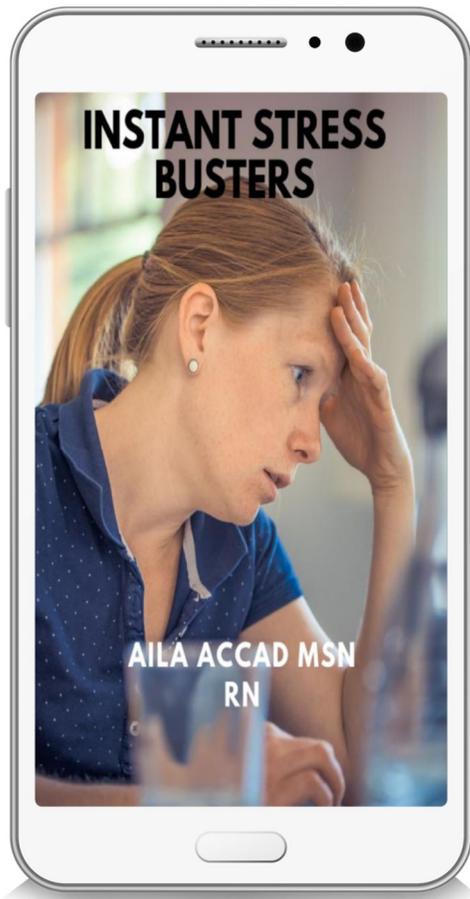
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- ✚ Do you think you are above average in your ability to handle a crisis?
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Let's go back to the show.

Pat: Tell us what should we be eating instead of macaroni and cheese and hoagies, and mashed potatoes, and French fries, and pizza?

Joanna: The more you know me, the more you'll realize that I'm not always about replacing entirely because the mac and cheese has its place. Let's have less of the mac and cheese, but let's add some protein to it and add some green vegetables. We need the green leafy vegetables, broccoli, asparagus, green beans, green lettuces, kale, chard. All these green vegetables help to counteract the stress. They have the antioxidants that will help to fight the free radicals that are created by stress. They help you to age better. They have calcium and magnesium to help you relax the shoulders and relax the muscles.

It's not necessarily, "Okay, why don't we replace the mac and cheese and the hoagies?" Let's have less of it because we need you to take care of that comfort, but also take a step back and understand, okay, what's the stress? Let's get into a place of acceptance and love ourselves, love the situation, be loving to ourselves, breathe. Then just add some of those green vegetables and some protein to balance that blood sugar back. One other thing, those green vegetables also feed the good bacteria. That will be the thing that brings the level back up.

Pat: I've been using an app called "Noom" for the last five months, and it's written by psychologists. It is based on the premise that there are red, yellow and green foods.

Joanna: Okay.

Pat: It does not say you have to eliminate all the red foods, but in moderation you can have a certain number of calories per day that are considered red. But you've got to load up on the yellows and the green foods.

Joanna: Right.

Pat: I saw a study, I think it was at Massachusetts General Hospital, that in the cafeteria... and I'm sure they're not the only place doing this, but in the cafeteria they've been using color code systems to label the foods and then watching to see how much are they selling of the green and the yellow foods compared to the red. And they've been conditioning their staff and seeing a decrease in the red foods.

Joanna: Awesome. When I work with clients, it's first understanding the behavior and understanding the food choices. I have a book that I use, as well, that is all about the apparent causes of food cravings and choices of certain foods, which are a reflection of a lack of self-love in that situation or some kind of an emotion that that needs healing. We choose foods to heal the emotion, but we're not really healing the emotion. We're just suppressing and comforting the emotion now.

A lot of times it's really understanding what the scenario is and then how do we make it better. How do we make it better? That sounds so like what the hospital was doing with the color coding is "How do we just make it better?" Because if I tell you don't eat mac and cheese, I



think you're going to be stressed. I'm not really helping the situation. I'm making it worse.

Pat: I think you're pointing out something that's important. We could eat perfectly healthy, balanced meals but if we don't tackle the other manifestations of stress, maybe we got our eating under control but we're not sleeping at night, then we're going to buzz around in a circle of increasing frustration and fatigue and then continuing to suffer with the stress.

Joanna: Right. The lack of sleep is a stress itself. The body is in a state of stress from the minute you wake up, but you weren't rested. So, it's about really what do we need to do to minimize the stress so that you can sleep better. Consider the timing of the meal sometimes. I have some clients that, though typically the ones who are not sleeping well, are eating late at night. So, they eat, and they go right to bed. That will disrupt your sleep every single time.

Pat: Yes, and sometimes give you nightmares.

Joanna: Absolutely. Depending on what you choose, absolutely. it's really looking at that, at the whole picture and the whole body, and saying, "Okay, where is the biggest stressor coming from right now? What are the things that we can do to minimize some of the stress?" Like let's say it's sleep is the biggest issue. Let's see how we can improve your sleep and then what can we do during the day so that we can give you foods to counteract the stress that you have from the lack of sleep and give you more energy. I think a lot of people don't know that the green vegetables are also high in B vitamins, and the B vitamins are what give you energy.

Pat: I'm laughing when you were talking about the leafy greens for salads because I have a friend who thinks that kale is the most horrendous thing that's ever been invented. I said, "You know there are different kinds of kale. There's the more mature kale that's tougher and curly, but baby kale is absolutely fabulous."

Joanna: The baby kale is what I suggest for people that are a little queasy about it. I tell them it almost tastes just like spinach, so if you like spinach, you're going to like the baby kale. So, it's a happy medium, and a lot of what I do is trying to work with people's likes and dislikes



but coming up with ideas of how to make it easier for them to incorporate. Because if it's hard, it adds more stress and we're trying to counteract the stress, not make more stress.

Pat: I'm also reminded as I'm listening to you that my local supermarket, where I was this afternoon, used to have a section that was the high nutrition organic food, you know the little clear bags of ground grains and it was just one aisle, and now they have dispersed those foods throughout the store. I think they're giving us messages that maybe it's not this sort of fringe area of the store, but it's part of the choices that you should consider when you go shopping.

Joanna: Yeah, and I do grocery store tours with some of my clients as well. The old saying was, "Eat only on the periphery of the store."

Pat: Right.

Joanna: I happen to have a store here that's called Wegmans. And I don't know if they're across the country, but I have one near me and their produce section is in the middle of the store and the rest of the store is everything else. So, I had to throw that out the window. But I help clients go through each of the aisles and say, "Okay, look at these labels. These are what you're going to be looking for. If you need the processed food, try to do these over these."

Nobody's going to die from one serving of Ruffles potato chips. I'm not picking on Ruffles, but that's the first thing that came to mind. There may be better potato chips to choose than the Ruffles. There may be better corn chips than Tostitos. So, once you start knowing what to look for then, it's much easier to make the choices and put the healthier choices into the cart. But if you want some Häagen-Dazs or Ben and Jerry's ice cream, why not? Occasionally, it's not going to be a bad thing, and sometimes you just darn well want it.

Pat: I think another thing that I have learned because of watching my sugar intake and being married to a diabetic who's got some kidney issues, is that sugar and salt are hidden in a lot of foods where you would never ever expect to see it.

Joanna: The processed foods are typically where all the sugar and salt is put in because they're flavor enhancers. You know both the sugar and salt are preservatives for certain foods. It's no surprise that the more the

processed foods you choose, the more of a sodium and sugar issue you will have. I work with a lot of clients on an anti-inflammatory diet as well because that will always help with stress, and pain, and GI issues.

A lot of times it's looking at those labels for the wheat and looking for the trends, the hydrogenated fats. Hydrogenated fat is not a natural food. It is a chemical. It's now a chemical because it's a hydrolyzed fat, but that is one of the more inflammatory foods only available in processed foods and sugar. Those are the three most inflammatory foods. You can have this but now pay attention to what is it doing in your body. When you eat those high sugar foods, you suddenly get this rush but then two hours later it's an absolute crash. That's creating stress on the body as well because that's blood sugar mismanagement.

Pat: I think that's a good point. I have noticed if I have a slice of pizza, my stomach recoils from all the fat. Growing up in New Jersey, of course, there's a whole culture around what type of pizza, how you hold it, how you drain it, whether you eat the point first or the wide part first, fold it up. Yeah, I mean, there's this whole thing associated with eating Jersey pizza, but I have cut it out of my diet because I don't like the way that it makes me feel afterwards.

Joanna: Yeah and I'm from Chicago originally, and we have the deep dish and the upside-down deep-dish pizza, so there's you know, extra, extra, extra cheese in there. There wasn't usually a debate on how to eat it, except for with your fingers or with a knife and fork. But that was also something that I have shied away from because the combination just doesn't make me feel good, and if it doesn't make you feel good, we shouldn't really be eating. That's a lot of what I do with my clients is help them start to be aware of how the food choices are making them feel.

As you say, and you might have said earlier, "Awareness is step one, right?" So, when we're aware, then we can do something about. When we're not aware, then we just blindly keep going and wonder, "Well how did this happen? Where did it come from?" But every client that I have, typically my first questions with them is, "When did this start? Was there a stressful occurrence or a long-term stress?" And 99 percent of them will say, "Yes," there was a stressful occurrence or a long period of stress that initiated their health issue.

Pat: I have two more questions as we wrap up. The first is in your experience, what is the one food group or food that would have the biggest impact positively and negatively?

Joanna: I think we just talked about some of the negative impacts of sugar and hydrogenated fats. Those are going to be in the negative. We would like to minimize those if we can't eliminate them entirely, but you can't replace the sugar in everything. You can't put honey in it as a replacement for everything either. But I would say to try to minimize hydrogenated fats, sugar, and then wheat would be the third. In terms of what to include, we've already talked about some of that. The green leafy vegetables, green vegetables, root vegetables.

It's really trying to increase more of the real food items into your diet. I'm going to take it one step further, try to cook at least twice a week at home because that really makes a big difference of getting real food. Because even eating out, there's a lot of sodium and sugar that could be added in there too for flavor enhancement.

Pat: How can our listeners find out more about you Joanna and the services that you offer?

Joanna: I have a website called "Nutrition in Motion." It's www.nutrition-in-motion.net and I'm also on LinkedIn, Facetime. Nutrition in Motion is also on Facebook. I think I have a Twitter account too, but I am most active on Facebook. I would say to find me, you would want to look up either Nutrition in Motion, PA. There's four other Nutrition in Motion in the U.S., so you want to put in "PA" just to make sure that you find me as opposed to someone in Ohio, Iowa or North Carolina.

Pat: Thank you. This has been great, and you've motivated me to take a more careful look at my kitchen. I'm glad that when I was out shopping, I was buying fresh greens, and peppers, and carrots, and fresh fruit and not bringing home the muffins with a hydrogenated fat, those terrible things that I love so much but can't eat.

Joanna: You know, I would suggest that you know you can buy them occasionally but buy just one. A lot of times what I do, because it doesn't sit well with me and I like the taste of it once in a while, but I will basically cut it into quarters, allow myself to eat a quarter and put the rest in the freezer.



Pat: That's a tip. That never occurred to me.

Joanna: Yeah, that's how I do it. One of the things that when you go to my website, there is a link there where you can schedule a 15-minute chat. If you have an issue, and you're not sure where to go with it, we can talk about, okay, what your situation is and what I would suggest is the step one that you can incorporate to make it less stressful for you.

Pat: Thank you, Joanna. I appreciate you being on the show. This has been Pat Iyer and Joanna Chodorowska talking about stress and nutrition, and some of those factors that can make you feel better and some of those behaviors that may not be as healthy for you.

I hope you've gotten some insight from the show and I appreciate you listening to the program. Be sure to tell other legal nurse consultants about Legal Nurse Podcast. We have a weekly show with an interview that comes out on Mondays, and then I comment on Wednesdays, and I love having you be part of our show. Thank you so much.

Joanna: Thank you Pat, it's been a pleasure being with you.

Pat Iyer again with one last mention of **Instant Stress Busters**, the training that shares methods to handle your stress so that you can have a correct work life balance. You'll be able to order this using the "learn more" button in the show notes for this podcast at podcast.legalnursebusiness.com. Or if you are listening to our podcast using our new mobile app, called biz.edu, you'll see the show notes on your phone. Get our app at legalnursebusiness.com/bizedu.

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