Dear Alice,

Please help! My fiancé is leaving to go serve his country in Iraq for a year and I am beside myself with worry. It's gotten to the point where I can't sleep or even concentrate on anything. My doctor tried to make me get on antidepressants, but I'm not depressed, just stressed and worried. Any suggestions on medications or at home techniques I can try to make myself relax and not think about it?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The deployment of a loved one to a combat zone is bound to create all sorts of stress. With the number of American troops heading overseas, you're certainly not alone with how you feel when it comes to the stresses of war. Worrying is normal, and the accompanying lack of sleep and focus are also common. Stress manifests in all sorts of ways and can compromise the immune system, leaving people more vulnerable to fatigue, illness, and injury.

Learning ways to reduce and manage stress? or rather, to make stress work for you? will help. In terms of suggestions on medications, your best bet is to continue working with your health care provider (or perhaps a psychiatrist and/or counselor) to figure out which or if mediation is right for you. Many times, finding the right medication can take some time.

For at home strategies, here are some options that other people in similar situations have found helpful:

Practice a relaxation technique, such as meditation, yoga, prayer, or deep breathing. Sign up for a class at a local yoga studio, or if you’re a student, possibly at your school's athletic center; or, find a comforting, quiet place to breathe and chill. Regular practice of these mind-body techniques can help you relax more deeply and effectively. Don't forget the benefits of a hot bath, good book, or relaxing music.
Be socially active. Stay connected with friends and family. Volunteer with a local organization so that you feel you are contributing to someone’s life in a positive way. Reach out and connect with other spouses or partners who are in a similar situation. There are often programming, services, groups, and resources that connect spouses and partners at the nearest military facility near your home. You can also find a wealth of resources on the Military OneSource Website [4].

Limit your media exposure. While you may want to stay informed and up-to-date, constant war images and speculation can only exacerbate worry.

Boost your immune system with regular exercise [5] and balanced nutrition [6]. Aerobic activity is one of the best stress-relievers available and has been shown to have a positive impact on immune system functioning. Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables to get the nutrients you need to better endure stressful times.

Seek help [7]. Recognizing, as you have, and managing your feelings opens doors to personal growth and resilience. Find ways to express your emotions.

Try to find and devote time each day to care for yourself. Call it "me time" or "be time"; doing whatever you can to maintain your health will improve your ability to handle war and other kinds of stress.

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health [8]
Stress & Anxiety [9]

Related questions

Post-active duty ? Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? [12]
Talking about traumatic events [13]
Fear about... everything (managing an overactive imagination) [14]
Still stressed by September 11th: Am I overreacting? [15]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [16]
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [17]
Medical Services (CUMC) [18]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [19]
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