

Our Healthy Lifestyles

Resident allows people a \$20 shopping spree

I recently was chatting with a Y member while we were waiting for our Y yoga class to begin and she shared with me a very moving story about a friend of hers. We were talking about our Christmas shopping and she told me that she has a friend who dresses up in clothes she typically wouldn't wear, goes out to the stores and finds someone who looks like they are struggling to make ends meet.

When they aren't looking she drops a twenty dollar bill on the floor next to them then gets their attention and says "excuse me



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but I think you dropped this." She told me that once her friend noticed a woman with a small child attempting to put some

toys on layaway and the store clerk was saying that she couldn't because she didn't have enough money to put down on the items. In comes the \$20 lady to save the day! Needless to say the struggling mom was able to put the toys on layaway.

This story stuck with me because of how selfless this woman is. She intentionally disguised herself so she would not be recognized by any shoppers and instead of handing out the money, she made it look like it was theirs already and she simply found it. She is giving her time and

money without wanting anything in return; not recognition, not praise or appreciation, nothing.

I bet she feels that her reward is the joy she gets when she thinks about each person she has helped and how she made a difference in their lives. I'd like to think that each person that received the 20 dollar 'gift' will realize the impact that one kind gesture can have on a person and pay it forward in some way.

I know when I was growing up we were taught to always try and "do the right thing" just because it was the right thing to do,

not because we would get something in return.

I do think that in today's world we forget this sometimes. Yes, we still 'do the right thing' and teach our kids to as well. But are we subconsciously expecting something in return? Perhaps a reward for turning in a lost or stolen item, a thank you note for doing a good deed or recognition for helping others. Now don't take this the wrong way.

I am all for receiving a big high five for doing "the right thing" but when you "do the right thing" in expectation of something

in return, it seems to lose its meaning.

As this new year begins I am going to challenge myself to be more like the truly anonymous \$20 lady and make a conscience effort to "do the right thing" whenever I can without expecting anything in return. Because, at the end of the day just knowing I "did the right thing" should be enough of a reward.

For more information about the YMCA contact Lynette Ferguson, Membership Services Director at 860-426-9522 or lferguson@southington-cheshireymca.org.

Taking a look at how stress influences our lives

"Stress" is typically used when describing "mental stress" but in actual fact stress comes from many sources and for many reasons: mental, emotional, chemical and physical. Job security, working too hard, not working at all, commuting, relationships, illness, worry about a loved one, lack of sleep, retirement, bereavement, moving house – all can serve to create stress. A recent survey by the American Psychology Association revealed that 54 percent of Americans are concerned about their stress levels, and two-thirds would likely seek help for their stress.

Many people are stressed without really knowing it; it's just the way of modern life and we get used to it. However, it still creates genuine strains on your body that are manifested as an increase in: blood pressure, heart rate,



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respiration, metabolism, and blood flow to your muscles. This is your primitive fight-or-flight reaction kicking in, preparing you for action in the face of a stressful situation.

Your stress (fight-or-flight) response, while useful in threatening and dangerous situations to preserve life and limb, is not healthy when it pretty much never goes away. Nowadays, it is rarely trig-

gered in response to an aggressor who must be fought off or a predator that must be fled from; instead, as an ongoing reaction to life's stresses, it is very harmful to your health.

Of course, different people will react to the same situation in different ways. It is not the situation, then, as much as the individual's reaction to it. What might stress one person may not bother another.

When stressed, your pituitary gland releases a hormone called adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH), which acts like an alarm system inside your brain. It instructs the adrenal glands on top of your kidneys to dump stress hormones into your bloodstream, including cortisol and adrenaline.

These cause numerous physiological changes in your body, including a rise in your heart rate and blood pressure, shutting down your digestive system, and affecting your immune system.

Following the panic, the cortisol and adrenaline in your bloodstream should decline to normal levels, as should your heart rate and blood pressure and other affected bodily functions.

The problem is when these levels are not allowed to reduce to normal levels, but instead remain raised due to the ongoing perceived stress of various situations. The body then never has a chance to fully recover its natural and healthful state. Long-term, this stress response can badly disrupt practically all your body's processes. You will probably have experienced some of these effects yourself: headaches and

upset stomachs are common results of stress, thanks to the effects of your stress hormones.

Your immune system also suffers with chronic stress, becoming weaker and less able to fend off colds and other infections. Working well, your immune system responds to infection by releasing several substances that cause inflammation. However, when chronic systemic inflammation takes place due to stress, degenerative diseases can become the order of the day.

Stress is known to affect the nervous system as well, causing anxiety, panic attacks, depression and even dementia, because the chronic release of cortisol can cause damage to certain parts of the brain. It equally affects sleep patterns and sex drive. The rise in heart rate and blood pressure for the cardiovascular system is a

very dangerous mix, with the potential for heart attacks or strokes.

You may be so used to being stressed that you may miss or dismiss the signs, so it's good to take stock and consider whether you are experiencing any of the following: anxiety, insomnia, back pain, constipation, shortness of breath, stiff neck, fatigue, upset stomach, weight gain or loss, depression, problems in relationships. Any of these may indicate you are stressed.

Next week, we will talk about some ways to naturally combat this stress response and help your body return to its normal state. Stay tuned.

Dr. Carol Grant, a local chiropractor, does not intend this column to substitute for medical advice. She urges you to always consult with your personal physician before changing any current program.

This one is an easy New Year's resolution to keep

Now that it's less than a week after the start of the New Year, we all might have fudged a bit on those earnest promises to ourselves. I sort of missed the full set of exercises I vowed to do each morning, but I had a good reason. Really.

Here is one easy resolution that is easy to keep, and is really, really good for you. "I promise to get my basic legal affairs in order." That's not hard. All it takes is a phone call for an appointment with your attorney. For almost everyone, that means one meeting to review your family situation, and one meeting to sign documents. You don't have to do it every day, or every week, or even once a month. Unless personal circumstances change, once is enough.

The documents everyone needs are a will, a power



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of attorney, a living will with designation of health care representative, and a HIPAA release so medical people will talk with your family. A living trust may be advisable in some circumstances.

Here are the excuses people make:

"My wife and I only

have a house with a mortgage and very little money so we don't need a will." Wrong. Young couples with minor children especially need wills so that they can decide who will raise those kids as their guardian if the terrible circumstance arises where both should die. The same goes for who will handle the money for the children. Don't forget that life insurance will cause those assets to add up.

Other reasons for the will are to name the executor who you want to handle your estate, and to provide for contingencies if you outlive your primary beneficiary.

"I don't need a power of attorney now. I'll do it when I'm older." Wrong, unless you have a crystal ball. Once a debilitating event occurs, and you are not capable of

signing, it is too late. There is no such thing as too early, but there is most assuredly a too late. The power of attorney allows your spouse or your child or other trusted person to handle your legal and financial affairs if you cannot. This is most important between elderly spouses, because if one becomes sick and needs significant care, the power of attorney is the document that will allow the healthy spouse to move assets in accordance with the Medicaid (Title 19) rules so that assets can be protected.

"I don't like to think about a living will because it makes me think of the end." That certainly is true, but that is the whole point of the living will and designation of health care representative.

You need to think ahead of time about who you want

to make regular, or end of life medical decisions for you, if you are unconscious or incapable of expressing those desires to the doctor treating you. Like the power of attorney, it's too late once you are incapable. And you need to tell the people you appoint what your wishes are and that you have named them.

Be sure they feel the same way about those decisions. And that they have the emotional ability to make that decision. Some children could never bring themselves to make the decision to terminate a parent's life support, so that is not the child you want to burden with the decision. Medical science keeps advancing, as do the situations that might call for difficult decisions.

And last, "What's a HIPAA, anyway?" Well, that

stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. When Congress passed it in 1996, it set out severe monetary penalties if medical people disclosed your private medical information to anyone. That is the reason you have to sign a so called "HIPAA" release when you go to your doctor.

The reason you should have a HIPAA is so that you can allow any medical person to speak with the family members you name on the HIPAA.

So to paraphrase, Dr. Seuss, today is your day. Your resolution is waiting.

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