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# The Power of Lifestyle Medicine

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## News

### Diet and COVID-19

An unhealthy lifestyle has a known association with several conditions and illness, such as obesity, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, and some forms of cancer and auto-immune diseases. A study published this month in the medical journal *Gut* entitled “Diet quality and risk and severity of COVID-19: a prospective cohort study” from a team led by Andrew T. Chan, M.D. from Harvard Medical School has linked poor nutrition as a factor in the risk for and severity of COVID-19 infection.

Over half a million subjects were surveyed in regard to diet quality, and that data was assessed according to the subjects’ risk and severity for COVID-19 infection. The results indicate that a diet that consists primarily of plant-based foods is associated with lower risk to become infected, and a lower severity of disease if infected in regard to COVID-19, even when the data took into account other contributing variables, such as other lifestyle factors, social determinants, and virus transmission measures.

When looking at the association of diet quality along with socioeconomic deprivation, the risk was greater than when the two factors from each risk was added, underlying the importance to address the need to provide improved nutrition in areas that are economically challenged.

Merino J, Joshi AD, Nguyen LH, *et al.* *Gut* Epub ahead of print: Retrieved 27 September 2021. doi:10.1136/gutjnl-2021-325353

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## *What's Missing From Medicine: Part 4 – Living Better with Mindful Stress Management*

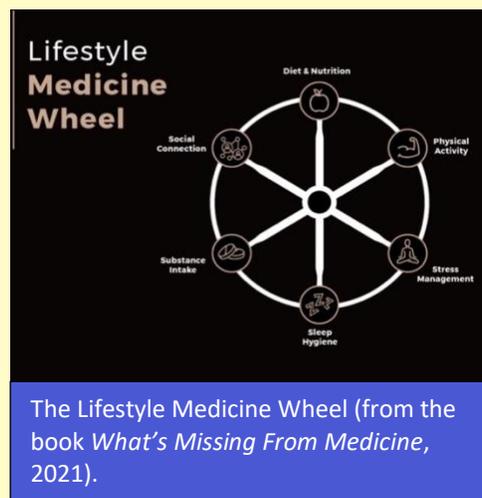
*Over the next several issues, we will present excerpted passages from the book “What’s Missing From Medicine” by Saray Stancic, M.D. To find the book to read in its entirety, please check Available Media on page 8.*

As we look at the stress spoke of the lifestyle medicine wheel, we’ll discover how to halt and reverse the damaging effects of stress on our physical and mental health. It’s important to remember that stress itself can never be eliminated from human experience. Indeed, we wouldn’t want it to be, since it plays an important role in our ability to perform and achieve. But when we shift our perspective, as in so many areas of our health and wellness, we gain insight. There’s a lot we can do in a general sense to work with the stress in our lives, and there are many specific tools I will share with you in this chapter....

We can think of stress as something that evolved to keep us safe, alive, and thriving. When a predator jumps from the bushes, or when it feels like the social group around you might get angry and force you out, your brain and body go into high alert, making all resources available to minimize whatever threat you are facing—real or perceived. If we were to make an analogy between our bodies and a computer, we could say that the brain is like a neural “motherboard” that accepts external input through our senses and processes an internal response, identifying what’s dangerous and what’s desirable at a mostly subconscious level. So while your brain is largely in charge of this process, you don’t have to *think* about ducking when a ball comes flying at your head. The stress response happens in a matter of nanoseconds. The brain sends and receives messages through the central nervous system, which travels through nerves to all corners of your body, and in turn communicates with the cardiovascular, immune, and endocrine systems.

This system works best when it can rest and recover between spikes of heavy traffic. When humans experience constant stress—even at a low level—the overwhelmed body and brain start to suffer. High stress can impact everything from our blood vessels (leaving us more susceptible to heart attack and stroke) to our endocrine systems

*(Continued on page 3)*





*What's Missing From Medicine:  
Part 4 – Living Better with  
Mindful Stress Management*

*(continued from page 2)*

(gumming up the hormone responses that control everything from mood to proper digestion). In this way, chronic stress can lead to chronic disease...

Stress puts pressure on the immune system as well, which calls up armies of white blood cells to prepare for battle in the event of acute stress. This can help fight off infection in the short term, but when it happens constantly over time it can wear down the effectiveness of the immune system, resulting in autoimmune disorders, allergies, and decreased cellular immunity.<sup>i</sup> When chronic stress wears down immunity on a cellular level, it might lead to a more severe cold, or recurrent upper respiratory infections. In other words, being sick while being stressed means feeling worse for longer...

While we can't pinpoint what is going to be stressful or not stressful to every person in every situation, the key is to learn about your own responses to stress and what you can do to better manage those... We want to figure out how to alter our perception of stress, as well as our brain and body responses to it, so that we can maintain a more healthy, balanced relationship with stress...

As with nutrition and exercise, societal messaging is part of the problem. So often we are told to simply "muscle through it," "toughen up," or "get over it" when it comes to feelings of stress and overwhelm. Most of us internalize this type of self-talk without realizing it, and we give ourselves a hard time when we're suffering as a result.

*(Continued on page 4)*

*“While we can't pinpoint what is going to be stressful or not stressful to every person in every situation, the key is to learn about your own responses to stress and what you can do to better manage those.”*

*What's Missing From Medicine:  
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*(continued from page 3)*



If you take some time to listen to the voice in your head, you will likely find that you speak to yourself in ways you would never speak to anyone else. For instance, if you saw your best friend struggling, or you see a crying child in need of assistance, I'm willing to bet your first response wouldn't be to tell them they're being ridiculous, or that they should push aside whatever they're feeling and toughen up. Yet this is exactly how so many of us speak to ourselves in moments of stress. While this type of negative self-talk may seem effective in some cases, it is ultimately a shortsighted solution that carries long-term risks when it comes to your health, not to mention it creates a lot of mental suffering in the process.

Like all the other changes I am advocating in this book, the first step is to shift our mindset. There is no better example of the need to do this than with stress, which almost always begins - and can end - in your mind. Returning to the theme at the beginning of this chapter: the foundational approach to dealing effectively with stress is being willing to change what you can while accepting what you can't.

*"...the foundational approach to dealing effectively with stress is being willing to change what you can while accepting what you can't.."*

<sup>1</sup> B. S. McEwen, "Protective and Damaging Effects of Stress Mediators," *New England Journal of Medicine* 338, no. 3 (January 1998): 171-179.



## *Meditation*

*(From the book "What's Missing From Medicine" by Saray Stancic, M.D.)*

Meditation often seems intimidating to many of my patients who haven't tried it. Popular misconceptions about meditation include things like you have to do it for lengthy periods of time, assume difficult postures, or go to special spaces such as remote temples to do it "correctly." There is also a common misconception that meditation involves somehow controlling your thoughts. In my experience with meditation, none of these things are true.

You can benefit from a meditation that is only a minute or two long, it can be done seated in a chair, walking, or even running, and the only special space I recommend is a place you can be alone and undisturbed for a few minutes. Perhaps most importantly, rather than trying to control your thoughts, meditation is about allowing your thoughts to simply be there, observing them rather than attaching to them. Meditation is simply an invitation to rest your mental muscle. With that background in mind, try a seated meditation, for as little as five minutes.

### **Quick Steps to Meditation**

1. To begin, find a place where you can be undisturbed for the next five to ten minutes. I recommend sitting in a chair or on a cushion on the floor—anywhere that allows for you to be comfortable and yet alert (so you don't fall asleep). Set a timer for five minutes. If you use your smartphone's timer, put it in airplane mode so you won't be interrupted.
2. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Notice your inhale and exhale, and feel your chest and stomach expand and contract. Pay attention to the feeling in your nose and mouth as the air goes back and forth through them. Your mind will likely begin to wander. This is normal. When you notice this has happened, simply allow the thought to be there and bring your attention back to your breath.
3. When the timer goes off, you're done! How'd it go? If five minutes was too long for you, then start with just two minutes. Eventually, I would love to see you work up to twenty minutes of meditation, three times per week.

Many people find that they are calmer in the days and moments between their set meditation times, and as a result they continue mediating regularly. If you are having trouble doing this alone, you can look for meditation groups in your area. There are many different types, religious and secular alike. Another option is to consider downloading suitable apps on your phone/device to support this new practice.

*"Meditation is simply an invitation to rest your mental muscle."*

# Dr. Stancic's Upcoming Speaking Engagements

**September 28**

Teaneck, NJ

**Grand Rounds, Holy Name Medical Center**

[LEARN MORE](#)

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**September 29**

Virtual

**Plant-based Nutrition Support Group**

[LEARN MORE](#)

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**October 2**

Midland, TX

**Food is Medicine Seminar**

[LEARN MORE](#)

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**October 23-24**

Virtual

**Plant-based Prevention of Disease Conference**

[LEARN MORE](#)

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## Available Media

### ***Code Blue***

*Code Blue* reveals lapses in the current state of medicine and provides a common-sense solution by featuring the practice of lifestyle medicine to prevent, manage, and reverse chronic diseases. The film presents the hurdles to the proposed shift: antiquated curricula in medical schools, confusion in the media, inadequate government policies, and the underlying influences of the pharmaceutical and food industries.

98 mins | USA | Documentary | Stereo | HD | NTSC

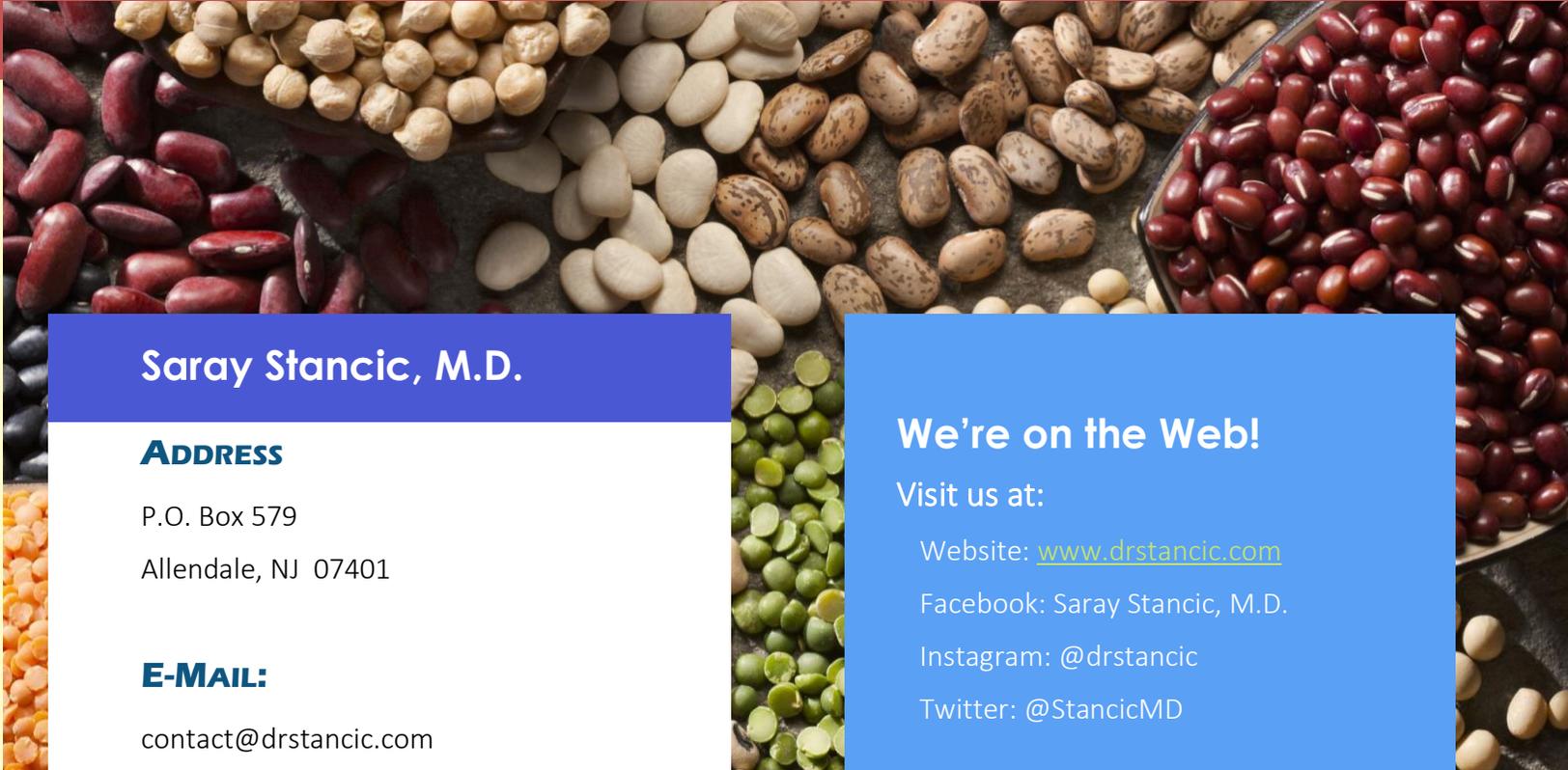
<https://www.codebluedoc.com>

### ***What's Missing From Medicine: Six Lifestyle Changes to Overcome Chronic Illness***

In this book, Dr. Stancic shares her own inspiring story and explains the incredible power that specific lifestyle changes can have for those living with chronic illness. Her prescription to prevent, treat, and even reverse chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, autoimmune diseases like lupus, multiple sclerosis, and many others, is what readers will find in this book.

<https://drstancic.com/whats-missing-from-medicine-book/>





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