AOTA’s Statement on Stress and Stress Disorders

Stress is a pervasive societal challenge that affects the social participation of people of varying ages, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2000). It is a significant risk factor in a number of health problems, including mental illness, cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and workplace injuries. Individuals with disabilities are disproportionately affected, with 49 percent of these people reporting adverse health effects from stress, compared with 34 percent of the general population (USDHHS, 2000).

Individuals, families, organizations, and communities differ significantly in their perceptions of and vulnerability to stressful events, as well as in their coping strategies. Organizational stressors, such as relocation or restructuring, may result in financial strain and loss of personnel. Community or population catastrophes, such as natural disasters or wars, result in stress from overwhelming personal loss, forced displacement, and a disruption of massive proportions in familiar daily routines and occupations (Wein, 2000).

The occupational therapy profession promotes the establishment of healthy habit patterns; familiar, predictable routines; and increased engagement in meaningful occupations that serve both as protective and healing factors in combating the negative effects of stress. Occupational therapy practitioners1 develop evidence-based interventions based on this philosophy, and conduct research to establish their efficacy for coping with stress (Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998; Nelson, 1996; Oaten & Chen, 2006; Wein, 2000).

1When the term occupational therapy practitioner is used in this document, it refers to both occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants (AOTA, 2006).

References


Related Reading


Author

Susan Stallings-Sahler, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

The Representative Assembly Coordinating Council (RACC)

Deborah Murphy-Fischer, MBA, OTR, BCR, IMT, Chairperson

Brent Braveman, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Linda Fazio, PhD, OTR/L, LPC, FAOTA

Coralie Glantz, OTR/L, BCG, FAOTA

Wendy C. Hildenbrand, MPH, OTR/L, FAOTA

Kathlyn L. Reed, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, MLIS

S. Maggie Reitz, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Susanne Smith Roley, MS, OTR/L, FAOTA

Carol H. Gwin, OT/L, Staff Liaison

Adopted by the Representative Assembly 2007/C82

Copyright © 2007, by the American Occupational Therapy Association.