



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 61 –

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Gina: Welcome to this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Destanie: And I'm Destanie. Drumroll, please. Making her grand debut on our podcast is the fantastic nurse practitioner, Christina Hayes. Welcome, Christina.

Christina: Hello, everyone.

Destanie: Tell us a little bit about yourself. What's your 4-1-1?

Christina: So I am a nurse practitioner at our onsite health clinic. I have been there for about a year now. I am new to the Needville area. I've lived here about two years with my husband, AJ, and our eight-month-old, Peyton.

Destanie: That's awesome.

Gina: I know that we had a recent lunch and learn with you regarding the stress and how it affects the body. So we thought that today's topic would be stress and how it affects the body in case those that haven't been to a lunch and learn missed any of that information.

Destanie: Now for your debut podcast question, what actually happens inside the body when we experience stress?

Christina: When we experience stress, we activate the body's fight or flight response. This causes the brain to release hormones, adrenaline, and cortisol, which increases heart rate, blood pressure, and alertness to help us respond to challenges. Short bursts of this are very normal, but when it's long-standing, it can begin to negatively affect our overall health.

Destanie: How can someone tell the difference between normal stress and chronic stress?

Christina: So normal stress is temporary and improves once the situation passes. Chronic stress is ongoing and can cause persistent symptoms like fatigue, irritability, poor sleep, headaches, or even trouble concentrating. A red flag for that chronic stress is when it starts to interfere with your daily life.

Gina: On that note, how does stress affect sleep and energy levels?



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Christina: So stress can cause you to have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or getting into a deep sleep due to the body remaining in a more alert state. Poor sleep results in low energy, brain fog and even increases that stress, which creates a cycle that can be very difficult to break.

Gina: So what is the connection between stress and mental health conditions like anxiety or depression?

Christina: So stress affects mood regulation and emotional resilience, which then worsens that anxiety and depression. People can experience excessive worry, irritability, low motivation, or social withdrawal when under a chronic amount of stress.

Destanie: How does chronic stress impact the immune system?

Christina: So chronic stress weakens the immune system and can actually increase inflammation as well, making us more prone to illness, decreasing recovery times, and worsening chronic conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes.

Destanie: What are some warning signs that stress is beginning to seriously impact overall health?

Christina: So some of the warning signs are some of those chronic symptoms we talked about, like persistent fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, poor sleep, mood changes, starting to have digestive issues, blood pressure goes up, or you're getting sick more often. If stress is truly affecting your daily functioning, that's when you really need to get it addressed.

Destanie: Are there certain groups of people more vulnerable to the physical effects of stress?

Christina: Yes. Definitely. So some of those are caregivers, healthcare workers, parents, first responders, and individuals with chronic illnesses, or even those with limited support systems.

Gina: What are some simple daily self-care habits that can help reduce stress?

Christina: So for everyone, they're gonna be a little bit different, but some things can be regular movement, deep breathing, spending time outdoors, limiting that screen time, staying connected with others, friends, family, and definitely making time for rest.

Gina: How important are exercise, sleep, and nutrition in stress management?

Christina: They are extremely important. So exercise helps regulate stress hormones. Sleep helps us to recover our body over time, and balanced nutrition supports energy and mood. All of this together forms the foundation of stress management and overall wellness.

Gina: So now that we finished this little talk, but before we go, you know what mine is for reducing stress after a long day? And believe it or not, my son can vouch for this, but we have chickens, and I love to go outside with the chickens. They are their own personalities, and it's so calming. I don't know, so if anybody has chickens out there, do y'all feel the same? I do. Destanie, how do you relieve stress in your life?



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Destanie: When I need to relieve some stress, I like to go on a walk outside, get some fresh air, but when it's not too hot because we live in Texas. And then I also like to lift weights. I lift heavy weights because Pilates doesn't do it for me. It just, I need to lift something heavy. Christina, how do you relieve stress?

Christina: Typically, I relieve stress by just taking that time back to my family, really trying to take some time off of work or time away from everyday life. We do like to vacation quite a bit, and, also, I do like to read. So getting lost in a good book for me is a big stress reliever.

Gina: Oh, I am down with that. I love audiobooks as well, so I'm with you on that.

Destanie: Thank you so much for joining us today. This was fun. We should do this again, Christina.

Christina: Sounds good. I look forward to it.

Gina: Well, that's a wrap for this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Destanie: And I'm Destanie. And stay tuned for our next podcast.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help.