



## Multicultural Stress Management

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### **Abstract**

Stress is a specific response by the body to a stimulus which tends to disturb the normal physiological equilibrium. Stress management skill can be culturally different due to the different parenting styles that is more popular in a culture. Diet is also related to stress as the mind and body are interrelated. Some evidences shown that staple diet had given rise to Parkinson or Alzheimer. Thus, nutrition and psychotherapy need to go together for effective stress management. Much evidence has supported the use of Ketogenic diet to manage stress. Psychotherapy, particularly schema therapy could manage stress through focusing on creating disassociation between our own vulnerability and our internalized critical voice. US recently focused on balancing imbalanced neurotransmitters in reducing stress symptoms. Lab tests can help detect the levels of our neurotransmitters and identify any imbalance of individual neurotransmitters contributing to stress related disorders, which are now available in Malaysia.

**Keywords: Multiculturalism; Stress Management; Schema Therapy; Multicultural Stress Management, Ketogenic Diet**

### **Defining Stress**

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), stress can be a major factor in many physical and mental conditions. So, what is stress and how can it be managed? Are there any significant cultural differences in our responses to stress especially between Malaysians and Americans?

Stress is a specific response by the body to a stimulus which tends to disturb the normal physiological equilibrium. Reactions to stress are associated with secretion of various hormones, the effect of which is to adapt the individual to its

new circumstance. It often causes physical, mental or emotional strain or tension. Too much or too little stress is both harmful and we want to maintain it to an optimum level.

### **Parenting Styles contributing to cultural differences in Stress Management between American and Malaysians**

Children will likely achieve most of their developmental milestones by the age of four and most of the blueprints of one's behavior is formulated by this age. So, it is safe to say that parenting styles and culture play a very crucial role in shaping a



person's behavior and eventually how they respond to stress. Malaysian parenting styles can be compared to that of Americans, and its impact on behavior, coping and stress management skills. Americans and Malaysians think and react differently to stress. Like most Asian parenting styles, it is evident among Malaysian households that parents have high expectations from children. The parenting styles namely includes: demanding parents, punitive parents and guilt-inducing parents. Punitive parenting aim to control the child, rather than meet the mental health needs. Parents following this method, reward good behaviour and shame negative behaviour through harsh comments, criticism and punishments. These children are expected to have an adult understanding of how to exhibit correct behaviour. Whereas, in "demanding or critical parenting style," these interactions are internalized into high standards and strict rules. Children are expected to be high achievers, strive for perfection and failure to do so creates tension and stress. On the other hand, guilt-inducing parents create shame and contempt towards one self. Self-attack develops leading to stress. The person criticizes himself and induces a sense of guilt and failure. The stress created by such environments have long-term effects and can stay with us much of our lives unless we seek to change through psychotherapy or get some positive life changing experience. We have internalized these parenting styles within us and we continue to give ourselves stress accordingly.

Many growing up in Malaysia were taught to obey the "rotan" (Rattan cane/caning punishment) to enforce discipline. In the US, however, punishments are mostly "time outs" where children are separated or deprived of play to reflect on what they did wrong. American parents tend to believe that pain

is detrimental to a child's emotional development, and hitting a child is against the law.

On the other hand American parents may have a tendency to over indulge their children leading to unhealthy eating habits. The development and over consumption of junk food is a leading issue factor contributing to stress compared to Asian nations.

### **Diet and Stress**

The fast food culture has also spread to Malaysians. A large portion of the stress we experience is from the foods that we eat. Mind and body are interconnected. Thus, nutrition plays a vital role in stress management.

Nutrition and psychotherapy need to go together for effective stress management. Much evidence has supported the use of Ketogenic diet which is high-fat and low-carb to manage stress.

In Malaysia, the staple diet consists of rice and food containing a lot of sugar, which directly contributes to stress and may give rise to various stress related disorders like Parkinson or Alzheimer. Much research has been conducted by American psychologists such as bestselling author, Dr. Daniel Amen (2003), author of "the Omni Diet" and with whom I was licensed to practice as a mental health coach, to show that the symptoms of stress related disorders can be reversed.

Ketogenic diet affects our stress hormone, cortisol, favourably. When we are in nutritional ketosis consistently, whereby our body produces a small amount of ketones from dietary fat, our cortisol levels decrease because we use the ketones as alternative fuel source which does not lead to the production of cortisol the way sugar does. Intermittent fasting, involving early dinner and late breakfast is



also recommended to achieve nutritional ketosis.

### **Stress Management and Psychotherapy**

One form of stress management practiced in Malaysia to change the stress created by internalized parenting styles is psychotherapy, particularly schema therapy (Tan, 2018). The schema technique focused on creating disassociation between our own vulnerability and our internalized critical voice which is causing us stress (Ibid.). This process helps the subject to manage and overcome the inner critical stress inducing critical voice. A new model of couple therapy known as positive psychology couple therapy, based on positive psychology has also been in practice, which is more enjoyable and effective form of psychotherapy for couples is distress (Chan, 2018).

### **Stress Management through Neurotransmitters modifications**

In US, the latest stress management techniques focused on balancing imbalanced brain chemicals called neurotransmitters. Recent research has shown that imbalanced neurotransmitters (Hinz, 2012; Dallé & Mabandla, 2018) cause stress. There are lab tests that can help detect the levels of our neurotransmitters and identify any imbalance of individual neurotransmitters contributing to stress related disorders. These lab tests are now available in Malaysia ([www.MalaysiaLaboratory.com](http://www.MalaysiaLaboratory.com)) as well as in America.

### **The best of both world**

We can incorporate the best of both Malaysian and American techniques for

the most effective stress management plan by combining effective psychotherapy and nutritional therapy.

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