



Your Nutritional State - A Result of your Coping?

Kathleen Hudson*

Nutritionist, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Kathleen Hudson, Nutritionist, USA.

Received: December 07, 2021

Published: January 01, 2022

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Your nutritional state – from where is it derived? Your nutritional state is intimately connected to your emotional state, and consequently the resultant coping style. Coping is quite complex. Coping can be positive, healthy, resilient, and also quite negative, destructive, and dangerous. Coping is impacted upon by many variables that are within your control and some that are not. In the big picture, these variables include such things as social, economic, cultural, gender and spiritual aspects. How does this effect your nutritional state?

It is probably best to provide the model to which this question can be responded to and provides some guidance. The coping complexity model as outlined by Hudson [1] clearly depicts the various components of coping. Coping is the inherent response to daily stressors. Stressors take many forms and their responses vary as well. This complexity of coping can influence a range of eating disorders from obesity, created by over eating, to illnesses of under eating such as anorexia nervosa.

Stress which takes the form of individual, group, community, or culture stress, in addition to its’ input on the timing, personality, number of concurrent stressors, and the level of significance of each stressor all contribute toward one’s feeling of stress. This stress(es) is appraised as a threat and harmful, a challenge and invigorating, or benign and irrelevant.

Coping responses are equally as complex and variable. The influences of coping are sociocultural, emotional, cognitive, and physical as depicted below (Table 1). These influences.

K. Hudson [1] Coping complexity model: Coping stressors, coping Influencing factors, and coping responses. Psychology, 7, 300-309. *newly identified components impact on diet decisions

Sociocultural	Emotional	Cognitive	Physical
Relationships	Spiritual/Religion	Clarity	Wellness/ Illness
Role Models	Determination	Awareness	Sleep/rest
Appearance	Motivation	Intuition	Diet
Personality	Anxiety	Intelligence	Drugs
Finances	Calmness	Problem Solving	Strength
Seek support	Emotional	Reflection	Endurance*
	Intelligence	Engagement	Weight*
	Self-efficacy	Resourcefulness	Nutritional Status*
	Readiness to Focus	Locus of Control	Exercise*
	Self-Esteem		

Table 1: Coping influences.

in a significant way. Each personality has both internal and external factors influencing food choices and quantities of food. For example, food choices to eliminate process foods and sugars lead to better mental acuity and therefore making better decisions when stressed. However, someone that does not get enough rest and reaches for quick unhealthy food will inherently be feeling even more tired and lethargic and potentially be making poorer decisions. Someone that is getting enough sleep and taking vitamins may feel more resilient toward conflicts being faced. Each of the above factors can play a significant part in one’s overall health and wellbeing.

When someone is stressed, they go through a coping process. Once the stressor has been appraised, disequilibrium occurs, and subsequently, a coping response occurs. This disequilibrium and coping response can vary, and include.

Temporary coping- short-term interim strategy to hold off the resolving decision, such as going for a walk and reflecting on the problem. Some people over eat when they feel stressed- such as candy, potatoes chips, or ice cream, which does not contribute toward a healthy weight and further complicates one's perspective. Dysfunction and poor food choices can contribute to significant problems with weight and weight-related illnesses. Over time, overuse of temporary coping creates problems worsened by the negative eating habits. The physical changes due to not making quick and effective decisions reflect poor self-control and diet management, and contribute to depression.

Effective coping- is when a reasonable solution is provided for the problem. This occurs when one is making solid decisions – good for the person themselves and for others. This effective coping strategy is most likely associated with those that take care of themselves, eat nutritional foods, get adequate sleep, and exercise to some degree. These functional/adaptive coping decision makers have adequate support systems and know how to use available resources. The positive outcomes of this group are their general overall health and wellness, both mentally and physically, due to consistent positive coping. Their diets are likely to be healthy, reflect good diet decision-making along with adequate self-control to not overeat. These are usually learned behaviors from a family life with strong healthy eating habits.

Those that make consistent positive coping decisions will develop resiliency, which is a critical key to minimize being overwhelmed and responding negatively- and having poorer outcomes. Resiliency and eustress are related. Eustress as defined by Merriam-Webster [2] as: 'A positive form of stress having a beneficial effect on health, motivation, performance, and emotional well-being'.

Someone with a good sense of eustress will be a healthier problem solver and considerate, and likely a good person to be around when at work or vacation. This person will likely care about their diet and their health, and eat accordingly. They will consider the calories, nutritional food value, and their exercise level. Before they buy or order their meals, they acknowledge the importance of a good diet on their overall health and performance. When working with someone and trying to get them to have better eating habits, these cognitively healthy eaters are good role models to use in demonstrating what better eating looks like and how it is done on a daily basis.

Dysfunctional/destructive coping- anyone with destructive coping styles will likely be a poor nutritional decision maker, as they do not prioritize their diet as critical (as it is intimately connected to sound decision-making, focus, and positive self-concepts). Their physical and psychological states are not healthy, and this can be debilitating. The problems are not addressed in a constructive fashion. Some may use alcohol to overcome their problems, which is a recognized negative spiral. The health and wellness of anyone with an eating or drinking issue will not be positive. Their appearance will not be healthy- they may be over or under weight. These negative thinking and problem solving issues will create unhealthy lifestyles, which create illnesses such as high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, drug use associated illnesses, stroke, and other diseases. These problems do not arise separately, but as a cluster of illnesses - where achieving wellness becomes both emotionally and physically too hard to obtain. One's diet choices significantly contribute to these illnesses.

A dysfunctional person's overall health status will not change until they develop healthier and effective coping strategies. This takes time, determination and effort, helping and supportive resources, and commitment. These characteristics are not found within dysfunctional decision makers and require change agents to initiate the change or a radical issue (physical or mental) arising in the person's life to force them to change. Without changes, death will likely be hastened. A chronic dysfunctional decision maker does not have the current cognitive, affective, or emotional capacity to make better decisions – or they would. These destructive decision makers will be poorly hydrated, likely undernourished or overweight, susceptible to illnesses, and negatively respond to others. Their negative mental attitude takes over their physical state and negative consequences result. This includes poor dietary decisions such as beverage choices with excessive calories and no nutrition and other eating habits which are not healthy and do not contribute to physical or mental health.

Thus poor eating habits are not created in isolation. They can start early in life as only having access to unhealthy foods or no direction when selecting foods. It is easier to hand a child a bag of chips than to make them a healthy sandwich. Nutritional value is not even considered.

As highlighted, one's nutrition is caught up in both physical and mental health components. Good decision making based on cor-

rect knowledge is the foundation for better nutrition. Both complex components of health (physical and mental health) need to be favoring positivity for overall wellness to occur. This is where educators and healthcare workers can focus. They need to address not just the person's diet, but more importantly, where the decision making for food choices originates from. The goal is to develop a well-rounded, healthy, food choice decision maker. This will not occur in isolation as the sources of core physical and mental illnesses need to be concurrently addressed.

Recommendations for simultaneously improving nutritional and lifestyle decision making include the following:

- First, supportive and caring attitudes toward anyone with these negative characteristics must be conveyed to represent your level of commitment in partnering with them to effect the necessary change
- Basic food and nutritional information provided along with ongoing practical feedback of nutritional value related to the diet choices in an ongoing supportive fashion. This is to increase diet awareness and its impact on overall health. The focus is not solely on diet, but on diet choices and outcomes related to a weight/health focus, maintaining an overall focus on wellness
- Ongoing education directed as small steps at covering a healthier lifestyle and relevant diet choices, provide support and encouragement to positive wellness steps that are taken. 'Rome was not built in a day' attitude will provide a slower pace of expectations'
- Assistance with finding ongoing positive social support and activities which they can personally relate to and engage in; avoiding and eliminating any current negative influences that will be a hindrance toward wellness
- Consider various physical activities that are appealing using an incremental progression that matches their dietary improvements, a) so the person gets exercise and its positive mental and physical benefits, and 2) group physical activities, so the person gets exposure and interaction in a supportive socialization process
- Identify mental challenges and change thinking toward positive resolution and healthier strategies to address the issues that are faced. As this is a core overall goal formal support

will need to be provided. Providing formal professional support when issues arise or problems are overwhelming will assist with the transition to positive strategizing and effective resolution. This is best when interval monitoring is provided to assist them with early motivational issues and deter negative thinking.

A historically negative pattern of behavior requires remodeling toward positive behaviors and improvement in positive eating habits. When this can more consistently occur, this leads toward improved health and wellness. Encouragement in 'enjoying the journey' and valuing 'caring for themselves', as a new healthy lifestyle evolves. This gradually replaces the previously negative situation. When someone is making dysfunctional decisions, their diet is of low priority or on the other hand, an escape mechanism. They overeat to distract them from their problems, which creates even more health and emotional problems. Correcting negative thinking toward positive problem solving takes time and effort. This is critical to work on to maintain any success while simultaneously working on poor diet decisions.

Physical and mental health and illness are manifestly intertwined. Physical illnesses are not recognized as inseparable from mental illnesses. Mental health should be focused on as much as or more than physical illness. Both physical and mental health are necessary and irreplaceable for overall wellness to occur. When there are problems with one or the other, both will suffer. As they both are inescapably intertwined together, both aspects of wellness need to be positively supported to build and maintain a solid wellness lifestyle. With a positively supported diet and eating habits, a more 'wellness' focus may occur (again, along with addressing fundamental mental health issues).

One's diet and eating habits are critical components toward wellness. However, they are a reflection of one's core self-beliefs, self-reflections, personal goals, personal habits, social norms, culture, financial situation, and environment. This is quite complex.

Eating and nutrition are imbedded in mental health. When someone has sound mental and physical systems to face the various and unavoidable daily challenges, when they are aware of their stresses and coping styles, then they can more positively influence the outcomes toward healthy coping, and subsequently, achieving wellness. Ultimately, diet is a reflection of one's mental state.

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1. K Hudson. "Coping complexity model: Coping stressors, coping Influencing factors, and coping responses". *Psychology* 7 (2016): 300-309.
2. Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. "Eustress" (2019).

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