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in Anesthesia

Kites in the Wind

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March is famous for its blustering winds and unpredictable weather changes. The winds are fickle—gusting cold air, blowing rain or snow, or quickly shifting to balmy, gentle breezes—often both in a single day.

March winds are cyclical winds caused by changes in temperature that signal the arrival of a new season. In many cultures, seasonal winds, known for sudden and dramatic changes in barometric pressure, humidity, and temperature, are referred to as “ill winds” or “winds of depression.” These winds are associated with short-term swings in mood and emotional well-being; including feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression.¹ The winds have different names. *Foehns* are dry southerly winds originating in the Sahara and blowing from the Alps across Switzerland and southern Germany. Likewise, generations have reported distress related to the winds in southern France (*mistral*), Italy (*the Sirocco*), Middle East (*Sharov* and *Hamsin*), western Canada and United States (*chinook*), and California (*Santa Ana*).

Published studies link changes in climate, particularly temperature and wind direction, to migraine headaches, anxiety, and feelings of depression. Although the recent study by Denissen² found no general ability for the weather to boost us into more positive moods, the researchers did substantiate previous published conclusions that the weather, with its changing winds, can have a negative impact on our moods.

Seasonal Mood Disorders

Seasonal mood disorders, including feelings of sadness and depression, have been well-documented¹ and appear to be more common in the winter months. They can be described as an illness involving the body, mood, thoughts, and behaviors.

Depressive disorders of any type pose a major occupational health challenge for workers. Healthcare providers in particular are at increased risk for problems of excessive stress, burnout, and depression. The healthcare environment demands constant adaptation to change, which often leads to increased stress, fatigue, communication problems, and a potential for staff conflict. Mix in the additional responsibilities of home and family and the result can be overwhelming, with implications for personal well-being as well as for productivity, absenteeism, patient safety, and medical care costs.³

Certainly, healthcare workers understand that to effectively care for other people, you must take good care of yourself. The greater the demands imposed on us, the more important it is to find ways to reduce stress, fatigue, and anxiety. Studies related to both organizational and worker-focused interventions have found successful coping strategies that can reduce stress among healthcare workers.^{3,4}

Coping usually involves adjusting to negative events or realities while attempting to maintain your emotional equilibrium. Meditation, relaxation practices, social support and interaction, and exercise seem to improve symptoms in people with symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. Most experts on stress will also recommend engaging in a hobby as a way to relax and get away from the tension associated with demanding schedules and work-related stress.³

Although you can't control the stressors of the weather or your work environment, you can minimize the impact by controlling your response to it. We are becoming more aware of the need for balance between work and home life and have a better understanding of the mind-body-spirit connection to overall health and wellness. No matter how busy we are if we want to live a more well-balanced, healthier, happier life, we need to find ways to reduce stress.



Go Fly a Kite

Surprisingly, kite flying has been shown to be one of the best ways to relieve the pressures of a stressful life. So much so, that the University of Irvine in California Psychology Department offers courses on kite flying to reduce stress. Enrollees found being outdoors in nature while letting your kite become swept away in the breezes, along with your anxieties, can be an incredibly relaxing and empowering experience.

It is a great way to spend quality time with friends and families. Kite flying also gets you out into the fresh air, offers an upper body workout, and can be therapeutic, meditative, and creative. You can dance kites elegantly in the air, paint a rainbow on the horizon, perform aerial maneuvers such as stalls, loops, and back flips, or simply see how high the kite will fly. Some people even use heavy duty power kites to pull themselves on skis, in buggies, or kayaks. Kites come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. Regardless of the design, a kite must conform to the laws of aerodynamics and embody three fundamental characteristics: an aerodynamic structure to gain lift from the wind, a tether to keep it from blowing away, and a bridle to direct the kite face at the proper angle to the wind.⁵

A kite creates an obstacle to the normal air flow that causes the air to change direction and speed. Air pressure is altered due to the changing

air speed and results in the kite being pushed higher producing lift and flight. Running with the kite and letting more and more of the line out into the wind allows the kite rise higher. The wind pushes up on the kite's face and lifts the kite, just as a supporting wedge pushed under an object lifts it up.

Once the kite is up, it is vital to maintain an active balance between tugging and releasing the kite, capturing the wind's power to carry the kite higher. Much like professional anesthesia skills, vigilance is needed to avoid sudden dips and losing the current or the kite will drift down or crash. It is only by "feeling" the tug of the kite string, and pulling it in different directions, that you can find the best wind and flying stability. It is only the delicate balance between "tugging and releasing" that will result in an enjoyable and fulfilling kite-flying experience.

Overall it is an activity that can provide a huge amount of pleasure, puts your head in a good place, and offers you some exercise. It is also a lesson in keeping a grounded and balanced attitude while dealing with the stressors of everyday life.

The Importance of Balance

You need a kite that is well balanced with a strong frame because the higher you want the kite to fly, the stronger the structure must be. Given a steady wind and a properly balanced kite, the kite will soar to great heights. But if the nose of the kite is pointed downward, the wind will send it crashing into the ground. Much like the kite, we need to make sure that we care for our bodies and minds and keep them in a good shape as they are the frames for our ability to cope with challenging situations.

Creating balance is a continuous process. Your attitude is one of the strongest factors you can control in your life. Be aware of it because it affects others and your experiences. Although we may not have control over every circumstance in our lives, we are in charge of our attitude. We choose how we wish to respond to the good and bad events that happen.

Just as wind can either lift a kite or destroy it, attitude can either motivate you to reach lofty heights or scatter your goals in the wind. Taking care of yourself requires always working towards maintaining a positive attitude and balance in your lifestyle.

A balanced lifestyle promotes health by strengthening our immune system, which serves as a buffer stress and negativity of tough times. Studies have found that both physiological and psychological components were prominent factors in health and well-being.⁶

Remember those New Years resolutions? Start a new hobby, relax more, get some exercise, and spend time with the family.

Unlike many hobbies and methods of relaxation, kite flying is something that the whole family can do together. Children are always fascinated by the magic of flying kites. As we grow older, kite flying allows us to keep that sense of magic wonder. More importantly, a few moments on a windy stretch of land, with family, by oneself, or

with great friends, can make the stress and chaos of the world disappear for a short period of time.

Wellness is found through many venues, there is no menu, instruction booklet, or to-do manual. Wellness is what feeds your individual sense of peace and fulfillment. Wellness acts as the foundation for overall physical and mental health.

Living well is your choice. It is essential to recognize that stress can affect decision-making, emotional stability, and performance.

Studies have found that mental and physical health is important for worker productivity. Balance is essential to good mental health and amid the uncertainty of today's world, bodies fueled with healthy food, a strong attitude, support, and a resilient spirit will carry us through challenging times.

Most importantly, whatever your choices, make sure you're having fun. Like the kite, take advantage of the best of the wind, its strength and direction, soaring and gliding to new heights of well-being. ■

*Kites rise highest against the
wind, not with it.* Churchill

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