

Coping with Stress

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What is Stress?

It is a natural part of life. Life without any stress would be dull and boring, but too much of it becomes unpleasant and tiring. Stress is a physical and psychological response to a demand, a threat, or some kind of problem that requires a solution. It stimulates you and increases your level of awareness. The body's reaction to stress is called the "fight or flight" response. These responses occur whether the stress is positive or negative in nature. Positive stress provides the means to express talents and energies and pursue talents. However, continual exposure to negative stress lowers the body's ability to cope in general.

Recognizing Stress -

Short-term reactions to stress include faster heartbeat, increased sweating, rapid breathing and tense muscles.

Long-term responses may include digestive problems, fatigue, increased blood pressure, or headaches. At the same time, a person may experience psychological responses such as fear, worry, depression, irritability or despair. Excess stress can seriously interfere with your ability to perform effectively. It can affect your health, vitality and peace-of-mind, and personal and professional relationships.

Helpful Strategies -

The art of stress management is to keep yourself at a level of activity that is healthy and enjoyable. Stress is a process that builds, so try to be aware of its early signs and make the necessary changes. Everyone handles stress differently, some better than others.

- Express yourself - We need someone to talk to who will simply listen.
- Talk it over with yourself - We often have no control over the unpleasant events that happen in our lives, but we can change what we say to ourselves about these events. All our feelings are greatly affected by what we say to ourselves. Avoid:
 - Catastrophizing ("This is the worst thing that ever happened to me...")
 - Generalizing ("my dog doesn't like me therefore, no one will...")
 - Projecting ("I'm sure this isn't going to work out...") Instead, try telling yourself "I am loved and safe" Practice talking nicely to yourself.
- Start exercising - Walk your dog, go dancing, or join a gym. Slowly increase your exercise level to include at least 20 minutes of exercise (preferably aerobic), 3-5 times per week.
- Eat healthy - Reduce alcohol and sedatives. Reduce consumption of caffeine and refined sugar. Increase consumption of whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables.
- Get in touch! Hug someone, hold hands or stroke a pet. Physical contact is a great way to relieve stress.
- Practice rest and relaxation - Take six deep breaths. Breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Use your imagination to place yourself on the beach, or in some other pleasant place from the past. Close your eyes and imagine the scene in detail, including all your senses. In just a couple of minutes you can re-experience the pleasure of actually being there. Get at least 7 hours of sleep nightly.
- Learn to laugh - Rent a comedy video and watch it with others (you'll laugh more).
- Stretch - Stand up. Raise your arms above your head. Stretch left and hold 1-2-3-4. Stretch right and hold. Repeat the stretch several times.
- Stop smoking - Nicotine is a stimulant, and it can increase anxiety.
- Seek professional help - If your stress your level becomes severe, seek help from a mental health professional who can help determine the best course of treatment for you.