



Stress Management

It is obvious that there are many ways one can define “stress”, whether used by psychologists, medics, management consultants or others. However, views from different definitions have been passionately held and aggressively defended. What complicates this is that intuitively we all feel that we know what stress is, as it is something we have all experienced.

Stress emerges from a dynamic relationship between a person and his or her environment that is viewed as potentially challenging, threatening, or harmful, and which leads to extra efforts to resolve the challenge, threat or harm through coping processes.

Stress can be a result of both positive and negative experiences. It is not an inevitable consequence of an event, but depends a lot on people's perceptions of a situation and their true ability to cope with it.

Stress can be identified through various symptoms. While many people do recognize the symptoms, others just choose to ignore them. These symptoms tell our bodies that something is off balance and need to be addressed.

Symptoms that are ignored can ultimately lead to much more serious health problems, such as hypertension, tension or migraine headaches and ulcers.

As a professional, you need to assess whether a problem is stressful or not, and evaluate how it should be coped with, if it is stressful. To reduce both stress related symptoms and the likelihood of developing more serious ailments, follow the tips section.

Tips

1. Relaxation Skills

While stress causes a more quick and shallow breathe, you need to control your rate of breathing. When you take slow, but deep breaths, your body will relax. When you do this correctly, you will notice your abdomen rising and falling with each breath. Other relaxation skills include progressive muscle relaxation, deep muscle relaxation, and self-hypnosis. Engaging in regular physical exercises can also be the best way to reduce stress and prevent the impact of stress.

2. Develop a Calming and Positive Focus

Try to focus on something which is pleasant, beautiful, or calming, e.g. painting, tree, or flower, or anything that stimulates you. Begin to train yourself to look for the positive things on a daily basis. Try as much as you can to avoid negativity, e.g. problems you encountered or mistakes you have made.

3. Laughter

Laughter is considered also as one of the best solution for stress. Try your best to make your day full of laughter. For example, tell a joke or read comics.

4. Be Realistic

Try to be realistic on what you can control and cannot control. If you're under stress, learn if the situation is controllable or not. If the situation is in your control, look for methods and execute plans to overcome it. If the situation is not in your control, learn to accept it.

5. Live in the Present

Try not to dwell on past events (e.g. past problems or failures etc.). While it is important to plan for your future, try not to worry about the future since we can only comprehend the present, develop a “one-day-at-a-time” state of mind.

6. Manage Your Time Properly

Lack of proper time management is another source of stress, especially for students. Develop a reasonable schedule which to include activities that can significantly reduce your stress. In your schedule remember also to put “Time on your own” Alone time can be used for relaxation or physical activities.

7. Try to Cope with Life around you

Confront life challenges rather than ignore them, because challenges or problems ignored are likely to worsen over time until they are solved. Some situation may require that you cry or weep as part of the solution, do that without hesitance. Understand that, allowing yourself to express some tears when you are emotionally upset can also be a great release and a big stress reducer.

8. Live a Spiritual-inspired Life

Though this may not be applicable to everyone, developing a more spiritual life, whether through a formalized religion or not, can help reduce stress. Spirituality, prayer or meditations can have a very comforting effect on the body.

Activities to Do On Your Own

- Set up a schedule or make a list of what you need to accomplish in a specific period of time.
- If you can't sleep at night because you are worrying about something/events – get up, write them down, tell yourself they can wait till tomorrow, and then get back to your bed.
- Talk to peers, friends, family or your supervisor about what is bothering you and find out how they would cope with your situation.
- Take this stress management quiz (adopted from Whetten and Cameron, 2005)
Respond to the following statements by writing a number from the rating scale. Be honest. This test is only to give you an idea about how well you manage your stress.

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| <p>_____ I maintain a program of regular exercise for fitness.</p> <p>_____ I maintain an open, trusting relationship with someone with whom I can share my frustration or stress.</p> <p>_____ I do practice several relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation.</p> <p>_____ I have a close relationship with someone who serves as my mentor or advisor in times of stress and frustration.</p> <p>_____ I use effective time-management techniques such as keeping track of my time, making to-do lists, and prioritizing tasks.</p> <p>_____ I strive to redefine problems as opportunities for improvement.</p> | <p><u>Rating Scale:</u> 0 = Never 1 = Seldom 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Always</p> <p><u>Results</u> If at least 4 or more statements were rated with a “3”: often or a “4”: always, you are less likely to face stress. Conversely, if at least 4 or more of your statements were rated with a “0”, “1” or “2” from the scale, the more likely you are to face stress.</p> |
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Other Resources

- Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (open 24 hours)
- UofA Student Distress Centre, SUB 030-N:
http://www.su.ualberta.ca/services_and_businesses/services/student_distress_centre
- Student Counselling Services, 780 492 5205, SUB 2-600
- Robinson, O. and Griffiths, A. "Coping with the Stress of Transformational Change in a Government Department" in the Journal of Applied Behavioural Science, June 2005
- Kim Maertz "Everything You Ever Needed to Know about Coping with Student life, But were Afraid to Ask" The University of Alberta Student Counselling Services.
- Whetten, D. and Cameron, K. (2005). Developing Management Skills. 6th Edition. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- <http://www.mindtools.com/stress/UnderstandStress/StressDefinition.htm>