



Managing Your Stress

Stress is the body's response to any demand made on it. Some forms of stress are normal and essential. For example, it can provide the means to express talents and energies or it can cause exhaustion, illness, heart attacks and accidents.

As the body responds to physical or psychological stress, the individual will experience and increase in their heart rate, blood pressure and secretions of certain hormones. These responses will occur whether the stress is positive or negative. Continual stress may cause disruption in one or more of the following areas of health: physical, emotional, spiritual and/or social.

RECOGNIZING STRESS

Stress is a process that builds. It's more effective to intervene early in the process rather than later. Try to become aware of the signs that suggest the process has begun. The following are signs that you may be experiencing stress:

- General irritability
- Elevated heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased accident proneness
- Feeling anxious for no specific reason
- Trembling
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Pain in neck and/or lower back
- Changes in appetite or sleep pattern

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH STRESS

When stress seems to be getting the upper hand in your life, remember these tips:

1. Structure each day to include a minimum of 20 minutes of aerobic exercise. Physical activity increases endorphin levels. Endorphins are the body's "feel-good" chemicals.
2. Eat well-balanced meals, including more whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables.
3. Avoid caffeine, which may aggravate anxiety, insomnia, nervousness and trembling.
4. Reduce refined sugars. Too much sugar causes frequent changes in blood glucose levels, adding stress to the body's physiological functioning.
5. Reduce alcohol and drugs. These substances may add to headaches and swelling, decrease coping mechanisms and add to depression.
6. Get at least 7 hours of sleep nightly. Fatigue is a best friend to stress.
7. Spend time each day with at least one relaxation technique—imagery, daydreaming, prayer, yoga or meditation.
8. Take a warm bath or shower.
9. Go for a walk.
10. Get in touch! Hug someone, hold hands or stroke a pet. Physical contact is a great way to relieve stress.
11. Helping others. It's almost impossible to feel stressed out when you're helping someone else.
12. Laughing. Laughter really is the best medicine. It takes 15 facial muscles to laugh and makes you feel good!
13. Talking. Instead of keeping it all to yourself, talk to someone you trust about the stress in your life.
14. Organization. Being unprepared and disorganized can make a difficult day or week even harder.

Proper planning and organization can be a challenge, but the payoff will be well worth it.

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