

Stress: Coping With Everyday Problems

Stress is a natural part of life. Everyday there are responsibilities, obligations and pressures that change and challenge you. In response to these daily strains, your body automatically increases blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, metabolism, and blood flow to muscles. However, when this natural response is prolonged or triggered too often without sufficient adjustments to counter its effects, it can threaten your health and well-being. Therefore, it is essential that you learn to cope with these natural responses in order to avoid physical and/or emotional problems.

Did you know?

- 75-90% of visits to physicians are stress related.
- Job stress is a major health factor costing businesses an estimated \$150 billion annually.
- Stress related disorders are a major cause of rapidly increasing health care costs.

How Do I Know If I'm Suffering From Stress And Tension?

Each person handles stress differently. Some people actually seek out situations, which may appear stressful to others. A major life decision, such as changing careers or buying a house, might be overwhelming for some people while others may welcome the change. Some find sitting in traffic too much to take, while others take it in stride. The key is determining your personal tolerance levels for stressful situations.

Stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders, which can compromise health, vitality, and peace-of-mind, all of which may affect personal and professional relationships. Too much stress can cause relatively minor illnesses like insomnia, backaches, or headaches as well as potentially life-threatening diseases like high blood pressure and heart disease.

Can you identify negative reactions to stress and tension?

1. Do minor problems and disappointments upset you excessively?
2. Do the small pleasures of life fail to satisfy you?
3. Are you unable to stop thinking of your worries?
4. Do you feel inadequate or suffer from self-doubt?

5. Are you constantly tired?
6. Do you experience flashes of anger over situations, which used to not bother you?
7. Have you noticed a change in sleeping or eating patterns?
8. Do you suffer from chronic pain, headaches, or back aches?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, consider the following suggestions.

Tips For Reducing Or Controlling Stress and Tension

As you read the following suggestions, remember that success will not come from a halfhearted effort, nor will it come overnight. It will take determination, persistence and time. Some suggestions may help immediately, but if your stress is chronic, it may require more attention and/or lifestyle changes. Determine YOUR tolerance level for stress and try to live within these limits. Learn to accept or change stressful and tense situations whenever possible.

- **Be Realistic.** If you feel overwhelmed by some activities (yours and/or your family's) learn to say NO! Eliminate an activity that is not necessary or ask someone else to help. You may be taking on more responsibility than you can or should handle. If you meet resistance, give reasons why you're making the changes. Be willing to listen to other's suggestions and be ready to compromise.
- **Shed the "superman/woman" urge.** No one is perfect, so don't expect perfection from yourself or others. Ask yourself: What really needs to be done? How much can I do? Is the deadline realistic? What adjustments can I make? Don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it.
- **Meditate.** Just ten to twenty minutes of quiet reflection may bring relief from chronic stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. Use the time to listen to music, relax and try to think of pleasant things or nothing at all.
- **Visualize.** Use your imagination and picture how you can manage a stressful situation more successfully. Whether it's a business presentation or moving to a new place, many people feel visual rehearsals boost self-confidence and enable them to take a more positive approach to a difficult task.
- **Take one thing at a time.** For people under tension or stress, an ordinary workload can sometimes seem unbearable. The best way to cope with this feeling of being overwhelmed is to take one task at a time. Pick one urgent task and work on it. Once you accomplish that task, choose the next one. The positive feeling of "checking off" work is very satisfying. It will motivate you to keep going.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise is a popular way to relieve stress. Twenty to thirty minutes of physical activity benefits both the body and the mind.
- **Hobbies.** Take a break from your worries by doing something you enjoy. Whether it's gardening or painting, schedule time to indulge your interest.

- **Healthy life style.** Good nutrition makes a difference. Limit intake of caffeine and alcohol (alcohol actually disturbs, not helps, regular sleep patterns), get adequate rest, exercise, and balance work and play.
- **Share your feelings.** A phone call to a friend lets you know that you are not the only one having a bad day, dealing with a sick child, or working in a busy office. Stay in touch with friends and family. Let them provide love, support, and guidance. Don't try to cope alone.
- **Give in occasionally.** Be flexible! If you find you're meeting constant opposition in either your personal or professional life, rethink your position or strategy. Arguing only intensifies stressful feelings. If you know you are right, stand your ground, but do so calmly and rationally. Make allowances for other's opinions and be prepared to compromise. If you are willing to give in, others may meet you halfway. Not only will you reduce your stress, you may find better solutions to your problems.
- **Go easy with criticism.** You may expect too much of yourself and others. Try not to feel frustrated, let down, disappointed, even "trapped" when another person does not measure up. The "other person" may be a wife, a husband, or child whom you are trying to change to suit yourself. Remember, everyone is unique, and has his or her own virtues, shortcomings, and right to develop as an individual.

Where To Get Help

Help may be as close as a friend or a spouse. But if you think that you or someone you know may be under more stress than just dealing with a passing difficulty, it may be helpful to talk with your doctor, spiritual advisor, or Mental Health America at 614-221-1441. They may suggest you visit with a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or other qualified counselor.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; community and professional mental health education and a newsletter for first-time parents available in both English and Spanish. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board and United Way of Central Ohio. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.