

We all experience stress; it is a normal reaction to daily demands placed on us at home, at work and even during sleep. This common condition is caused by stressors, which are the factors that trigger the stress response.

Stress has been identified as the underlying cause of many illnesses such as heart disease, cancer and skin conditions, to name a few. Many stressors are beyond an individual's control. For example, car problems' causing you to be late for work, only to find your computer has crashed when you finally arrive...late. Now your day has been off to a poor start only to find that your spouse called because your child has become ill. These types of stressors on a continued basis wreak havoc on your immune system and blood pressure.

Other types of stressors can also compound stress. You may have noisy neighbors or you may come home to a faulty air conditioner on a really hot day.

Repetitive manual work or being placed on a schedule that interrupts your circadian rhythm can become overwhelmingly stressful, quickly. These types of stressors are exacerbated by our present economy. Jobs are hard to find and downsizing is an ongoing threat in many industries. Being laid off or terminated can cause unbearable stress, especially when you have a family to support.

Having to report to a boss with whom you have a bad rapport is stressful and places you in a position of insecurity with little or no hope to move up the corporate ladder.

While there exists a plethora of stressors: there are also as many ways to deal with stress. There are certain stressful conditions that that elicit a common response. For example a near miss or an actual accident results in a cascade of physiological events that cause the adrenal glands to produce adrenalin. When adrenalin levels rise your system speeds up and you feel tight, ultimately this results in elevated cortisol levels. These are known as flight or flight responses and are helpful in times of emergency. However a rise in cortisol levels on a daily basis has been identified as a major factor in diminishing ones immune system. Without a healthy immune system we are vulnerable to a host of unwanted conditions.

As we age it becomes more difficult for our systems to return to a normal state after adrenalin and cortisol levels soar because of a stressful event.

Realizing how many stressors we have in our lives it may seem that there's nothing you can do about your stress level. However, you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you're in control of your life is the foundation of stress management.

The first step is to take charge of your life. Realize that you are in charge of your thoughts, emotions and the way you interact with your environment. Your schedule, your environment, and the way you deal with problems are all a matter of perspective. If you understand that you are actually in control, things start getting lighter and your body chemistry starts getting balanced,

To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:

- Do you work to the point of exhaustion? Can you remember your last day off or actually delegating responsibilities to other capable people?
- Do you just accept stress as part of your life and not realize you can take control?
- Do you blame stress on other people? Do you allow people to push you around or over work you?
- Do you simply accept stress as a normal part of life and not try to control your reactions to stressors?
- Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional?

Until you take responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining stress, your stress level will remain outside your control. Now is the time to take control of your life.

It is important to take personal downtime that is time just for you.

**Set aside relaxation time. For example, spend an extra five minutes in a hot shower and spend that time in an alpha state.** (You can get to alpha by simply counting backwards from 5 to 1 with your eyes closed) Allow yourself to understand that you are in charge and you will then be prepared for the problems that arise on a daily basis. In alpha you can create ways to control the stress in your life.

**Stay Connected with good friends.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.

- **Find time, on a daily basis, to be in the moment.** Use your mind to allow yourself to be in the moment. Enjoy whatever it is you are doing, notice details and enjoy a different perspective as often as possible. Be aware of the feel of your computer keys or the feel of the carpet under your feet, it amazing when you really connect with your environment.
- **Stay on the light side; enjoy your sense of humor.** This means enjoy yourself and don't take mistakes too seriously. Don't be too fragile; laugh at yourself. Lighten up and remember when you are laughing you are producing endorphins. These are the feel good neurotransmitters and they actually reduce cortisol levels.
- **Take control, a few simple changes can have serious positive effects on your health and well-being.** Just reading this is not enough; it is important that you actually follow through and take your life back.

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

- **Exercise regularly.** Even if you take a 20-minute brisk walk three or four times a week. Exercise is the key to good health.
- **Choose your foods wisely.** Eating a healthy balanced diet will provide you with energy and a strong immune system. Try to eat a high fiber low fat diet. Avoiding fried or overly processed food is a great way to get healthier and happier. Remember you are what you eat, literally.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** Remember caffeine is
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- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.
- **Read self help articles.** Learning about effective way to cope with stress from many perspectives and discover which method works best for you.

**Find a therapist that you can relate with.**