



Stress Management



What is Stress?

Stress your body's response to perceived danger. It is the "fight or flight" mechanism triggered by the release of adrenaline into the bloodstream. Physical symptoms of stress include increased heart rate, sleeplessness, anxiety and variable appetite. A crisis or several smaller stressors together can result in long term stress. Long term stress causes the release of a hormone called Cortisol, which increases your risk of burnout, obesity and weight management difficulties, cardiovascular health problems, digestive problems (e.g. ulcers) and depression.

Assess your current stressors and coping strategies

- Write a list of all the situations or pressures that produce stress in your life (such as personal pressure to succeed, financial worries, work deadlines or family problems)
- Brainstorm how you currently cope with each of these stressful experiences:

Healthy Coping Styles

exercise
 allowing down time for yourself
 balancing work and play
 initiating a schedule
 relaxation techniques
 prioritising your time

Unhealthy Coping Styles

alcohol or drug use
 avoidance of the stressor
 procrastination
 emotional eating
 blaming others
 taking your stress out on those you care about

Relaxation Techniques

- Write a list of activities which you consider relaxing (e.g. going for a walk, meeting with friends, reading, listening to music or taking a bubble bath)
- Set a realistic goal for how much "down time" you need and schedule this into each day
- Find a specific relaxation technique that works for you (e.g. meditation, visualisation, deep breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation) and practise it often

Mastering Your Body

- Aerobic exercise such as jogging, cycling or boxercise can reduce anxiety by up to 50%
- A well balanced diet will improve your ability to appropriately respond to stress
- Get an adequate amount of rest each night - 6 to 8 hours per night is ideal
- Drink less caffeine, as 2 ½ cups of coffee will double your stress hormone levels
- Choose to be a non-smoker, because nicotine increases stress hormone levels

Mastering Your Mind

- If you have multiple stressors in your life, plan and prioritise your time well
- Break large demands into small, manageable tasks and work through one task at a time
- Identify your goals and focus on doing what needs to be done to work towards these
- Take action as soon as a stressor arises
- Identify your needs and articulate them to those around you
- Don't be afraid to ask others for help – this is not a sign of weakness
- Develop a support network of friends, family and/or counsellors to rely on in times of need
- Set realistic expectations – only set out to accomplish what is humanly possible. Realise that in spite of your best efforts, you can't always get everything done. Often this is out of our control, as there are other environmental factors affecting the outcome.
- Put things in perspective. If you start to feel stressed about something, ask yourself "what's the worst possible thing that could happen?" Usually the worst possible outcome isn't so bad after all and isn't worth worrying about.
- Stop yourself from constantly thinking "I should be doing..."

Disclaimer

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