

RECOGNIZING STRESS

Many of us are not very good at recognizing our emotional reactions and consequently find that we first notice our physical responses.

Because you may not recognize that you are under increased stress, you may interpret the symptoms as those of an illness rather than stress. The thought that you may have a new illness can be frightening and can add to the emotional burden you already have.

Stress can also become apparent through psychological changes, which may include increased irritability, cynicism, pessimism or resentment. Things that you normally looked forward to, now seem burdensome. Crying or laughing excessively is also a common symptom.

DEALING WITH STRESS

The first step in learning to manage our stress-related reactions is to become more aware of the things that may be particularly stressful for us. When we encounter them we want to recognize them as being the source of our discomfort. Recognizing such elements helps us to be more in control.



KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

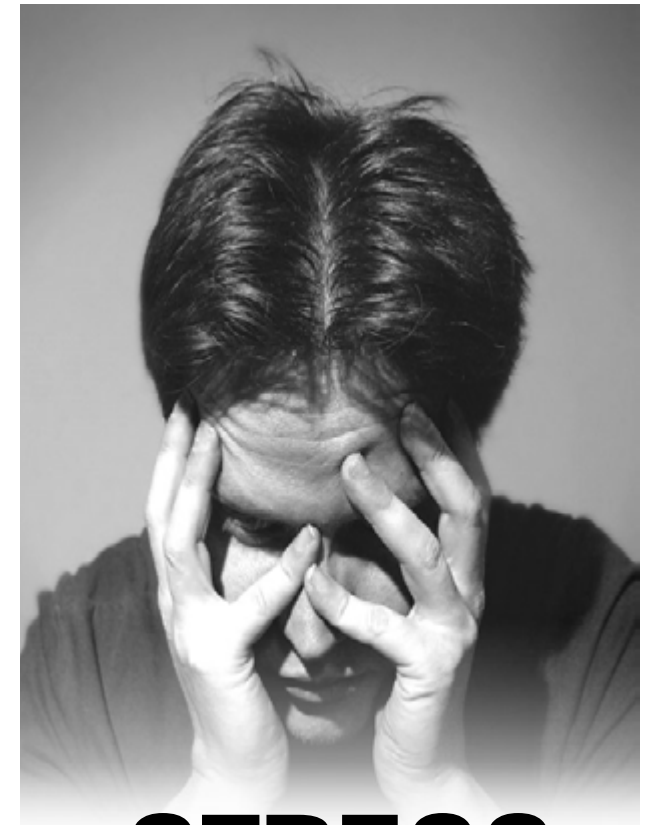
Most of us tend to worry about things over which we have no control. When faced with worries and fears, try to look beyond the event and give yourself a little pep talk for reassurance. Try not to let feelings of defeat, fear or disappointment overtake you. The more positively you can approach a situation, the more likely it is that you will be able to face and influence the outcome.

Sometimes the help of a counsellor, psychologist, clergyman or friend may be just what you need to help you handle stress. This is not a sign of weakness but strength. It takes strength to realize and accept that you need help.

You can be in control



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STRESS

fear • job • worry • trauma • friends



TYPES OF STRESS

- **Eustress:** stress that helps us to do a good job. An example would be the nerves we get before a public presentation; this stress can help us do a better job.
- **Distress:** which is a negative and can build up inside us, even to the point of physical illness, such as hypertension.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

1. Cognitive

Impaired thinking and decision making, poor concentration, confusion, memory loss, flashbacks, reduced attention span, time distortion

2. Emotional

Anxiety, guilt, fear, grief, feeling lost, helpless, abandoned, withdrawal from others, anger, resentment, feeling numb, shocked, overwhelmed

3. Physical

Nausea, upset stomach, sweating, disorientation, loss of concentration, heart rate and blood pressure increases, hyperventilation, chest pains

4. Behavioural

Difficulty in communicating, withdrawal, outbursts of anger, arguments, inability to relax, crying or laughing, increased use of alcohol and/or drugs

COPING WITH STRESS

- know your stressors
- change the scene
- organize yourself and your time
- eat properly
- rest
- change behaviours
- change outlooks and perceptions

THINGS TO TRY

- Physical exercise, alternated with relaxation to help alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Talk to people. Talk is the most healing medicine. Reach out, people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible and try to spend time with others.
- Don't make any big changes in your life style, however make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal, don't try to fight them.

Be Positive

Stress awareness and relaxation techniques are key elements of stress management. Equally important is a positive approach to life in general, both in your mental attitude and physical lifestyle.



Relax

- Deep breathing is the most basic relaxation of stress
- Autogenics (mind over matter) is another way to relax. You can literally tell your body how to feel and produce relaxation
- Clearing your mind is when you try to concentrate on one pleasant thought, word or image and let the rest of the worries slip away
- Stretching will help to loosen up tight muscles and combat stress
- Visualization can be thought of as a "mental vacation," a license to daydream which can produce feelings of relaxation.

Positive Thinking

Give yourself permission to reduce your stress. Creating a positive mindset takes practice, but it can be very helpful.

- "Self-talk" means telling yourself what you can or can't do. Positive self-talk is saying "I CAN" and then setting your mind to face the challenges ahead.
 - Rehearsal is a way to prepare for a potentially stressful situation before it occurs. Think over the situation, go over the details and plan to take action.
 - Developing an action plan can help you turn a potential stress disaster into a new opportunity. Always make an alternate plan, just in case the one you rehearsed doesn't work out.
 - Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you may need someone to talk to. Finding a supportive person helps you to know that you are not alone.
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