

MARCH 2015

STRESS

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Are the bills starting to pile up? Is your family and career extremely demanding? Feel there is never enough time in one day to get everything done? Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from a demanding circumstance. According to the Mayo Clinic, surveys show that millions of Americans experience challenges with stress at some point during the year. If you are someone who experiences stress, you need to take charge of your thoughts, emotions, schedule, and any other sources of stress you may have. Without stress management, high levels of stress can lead to serious health problems. Don't wait to see the negative effects of stress, start practicing stress management techniques now.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress management starts with identifying the different sources and triggers of stress in your life; this isn't always an easy task to tackle. Your sources of stress may not be so obvious, and it's easy to hide emotion, feelings, and/or behaviors that are stress-inducing. For example: you may feel that you are constantly worried about deadlines at work, when in reality it's your procrastination, rather than the deadline itself that leads to your stress.

Start out by trying to identify those sources of stress in your life. To identify a "true" source of stress, you need to take a deeper look at your attitude, behavior, habits, and excuses. Ask yourself these three things:

- ✓ Do I explain stress as temporary? - "I just have a million things going on right now."
- ✓ Do I define stress as a part of my work or home life? - "Things are always crazy."

- ✓ Do I blame my stress on other people, events, or view it as being "normal"

Until you take a step back and take some responsibility for how you contribute to your own stress, you will never be able to manage it.



COPING WITH STRESS

Take a moment and evaluate how you currently manage your stress. A healthy way to cope with your stress is to keep a stress journal. A stress journal will help you identify the different stressors in your life and what is causing them. Every time you feel stressed, take a moment to write down what caused your stress, how you feel, how you act in response to the stress, and what you did to help yourself feel better. By doing this you will start to see patterns and common triggers which will allow you to avoid these stressors.

The one thing you do not want to do is respond to your stress in an unhealthy way. The following strategies

may help you reduce your stress temporarily but may cause damage physically or mentally in the long run:

- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ Drinking
- ✓ Overeating/under-eating
- ✓ Withdrawal from family/friends
- ✓ Using pills or drugs to relax
- ✓ Sleeping excessively
- ✓ Taking your stress out on others
(angry outbursts, physical violence)

If you are finding that your methods for handling stress are unhealthy and not helping your emotional/physical state in the long run, its time to change your ways. When deciding on alternative ways to handle stress, it is helpful to think of the four A's: Avoid the stressor, Alter the stressor, Adapt to the stress, and Accept the stressor.

The Four A's

Avoid the Stressor: At times you will come into a situation that cannot be avoided and needs to be addressed; however, there are a number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate, such as:

- ✓ Learn to say "no" – Know how much you can take professionally and/or personally and do not take on more than you can handle.
- ✓ Avoid people who stress you out – If there is one particular individual that you find leaves you stressed, limit the amount of time that you dedicate to spending time with them, or end the relationship entirely.
- ✓ Learn to take control of your environment – If you find that your ride home is a traffic mess and leaves you tense, take a different less-traveled route.
- ✓ If you feel yourself restless after watching the evening news, then turn off the TV.
- ✓ Avoid hot-button topics – If politics are a conversation piece that leaves you heated, cross it off your list of topics and/or excuse yourself when the topic comes up.

Alter the Situation: If you find that there is no way to avoid the situation then try and alter it. This may require you to change the way you communicate and function in your daily life. Things that can help you alter the situation are learning to express your feelings, being willing to compromise, being more assertive in a given situation, and learning to manage your time better. Any of these options will help alleviate and even eliminate a stressful situation.

Adapt to the Stressor: If avoiding or altering a stressful situation is not in the cards, then change your expectations and attitude. Learning to reframe a problem will allow

you to view the stressor in a positive manner. Having a positive outlook will help keep things in perspective for you by being able to reflect on the good things in life rather than the stress. Another way to help adapt to the stressor is by taking a look at the big picture and asking yourself if this situation will really matter in a month or year.

Accept the Stressor: There are certain situations in life that cannot be avoided or altered, such as death or illness. In these cases the best way to cope is to accept the cards at hand. Acceptance is a hard concept to grasp but tends to be easier than fighting against a situation that cannot be changed.

Healthy Ways to Relax & Recharge

- ✓ Go for a walk
- ✓ Call a friend
- ✓ Workout
- ✓ Write in a journal
- ✓ Work in your garden
- ✓ Enjoy a sport
- ✓ Read
- ✓ Listen to music
- ✓ Watch a comedy

