
Stress Reduction

SSS Workshop

What is Stress?

- The subject of *stress* has become a common topic of conversation. We often hear friends, classmates, coworkers, and family members talk about the problems they have in managing the stresses of everyday living. We say we feel "burned out," stressed out, overwhelmed, angry, irritable, depressed, anxious, and on the verge of "losing it."
- **Stress can be defined as our mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to any perceived demands or threats.**



What Seems Stressful to You?

- There are many different situations that are related to our feeling stressed:

- *Work/Job

- *School

- *Relationship with partner

- *Relationship with family

- *Relationship with friend(s)

- *Grief/Loss

- *Spiritual/Religious issues

- *Natural disaster

- *Trauma

- *Mental Health

- *Physical Health

- *Appearance

- *Self-esteem

- *Childcare

- *Finances

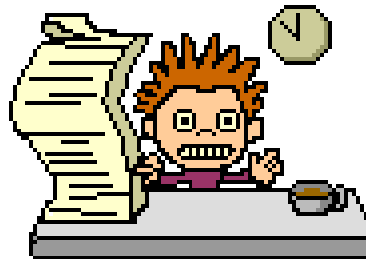
- *Legal Matters

- *Major Career Decision

- *Thoughts

Stress is a Normal Part of Life

- **Experiencing some amount of stress in our lives is protective and adaptive. Our responses to stress help our minds and bodies to prepare for difficult challenges, and to react appropriately in a time of crisis. In fact, a certain amount of stress is necessary to help us perform at our best. Stress adds flavor, challenge and opportunity to life. Without stress, life could become quite dull and unexciting.**



Not All Stress is Bad

- There are two types of stress...
 - **Distress** is a continuous experience of feeling overwhelmed, oppressed, and behind in our responsibilities. It is the all encompassing sense of being imposed upon by difficulties with no light at the end of the tunnel. Examples of distress include financial difficulties, conflicts in relationships, excessive obligations, managing a chronic illness, or experiencing a trauma.
 - **Eustress** is the other form of stress that is positive and beneficial. We may feel challenged, but the sources of the stress are opportunities that are meaningful to us. Eustress helps provide us with energy and motivation to meet our responsibilities and achieve our goals. Examples of eustress include graduating from college, getting married, receiving a promotion, or changing jobs.
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What Can Lead to Stress?

- **Environmental factors** such as excessive noise, bad weather or natural disasters, busy traffic, pollution, problems with roommates or neighbors
 - **Social factors** including deadlines, financial problems, group projects, disagreements, demands on time and attention, dating, balancing work and school, loss of a loved one, conflicts with family
 - **Physiological factors** such as adolescence, illness, accidents, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, alcohol or drug use/abuse, sleep disturbances, muscle tension, headaches, upset stomach
 - **Thoughts**, including our perception of events, expecting too much from others, making decisions, having a pessimistic attitude, expecting problem-free living, worrying, being a perfectionist, being competitive, being self-critical, making assumptions
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Vulnerability to Stress

- Certain aspects of our habits, our lifestyles, and our environments can make each of us more or less vulnerable to the negative effects of stress.



Are You Vulnerable to Stress?

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytj9PNg2RwU->

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Why Do We Stress Out?

- Essentially, we stress out for two main reasons...
- 1. We *perceive* a situation as dangerous, difficult, or painful.
- 2. We don't believe we have the *resources* to cope.



Our Perceptions = How Stressed We Feel

- We often identify specific events, people, or situations that seem to make us feel stressed. It's as if these things automatically cause us to feel stressed out. In reality, it's how we perceive an event, the meaning we give to it, that leads us to feel stressed or not stressed about it.
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Some Stress Warning Signals

- We pay a lot of attention to things in the outer world that are related to stress such as financial difficulties, conflicts in relationships, and overwhelming responsibilities.
- We tend NOT to pay enough attention to our inner worlds, the signals that stress is starting to take its toll on us.
- We are often quite good at ignoring those internal signals and pushing ourselves even harder. If we keep pushing ourselves, eventually something inside of us will send "red flags," or warning signs that stress is becoming a problem.



Some Stress Warning Signals

- **Physical Symptoms**

headaches

indigestion

stomach aches

sweaty palms

cold hands, feet

dizziness

easily fatigued

muscle tension/ back pain

tight neck, shoulders

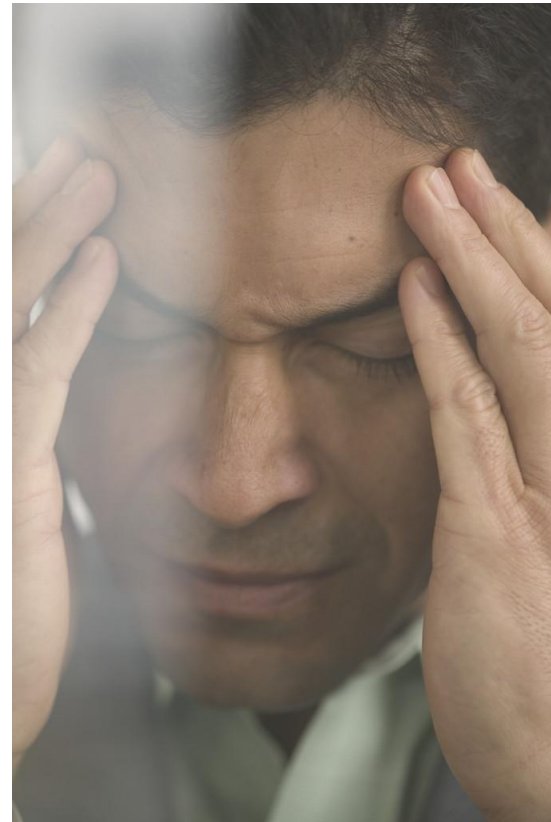
racing heart

shallow breathing

restlessness

ringing in the ears

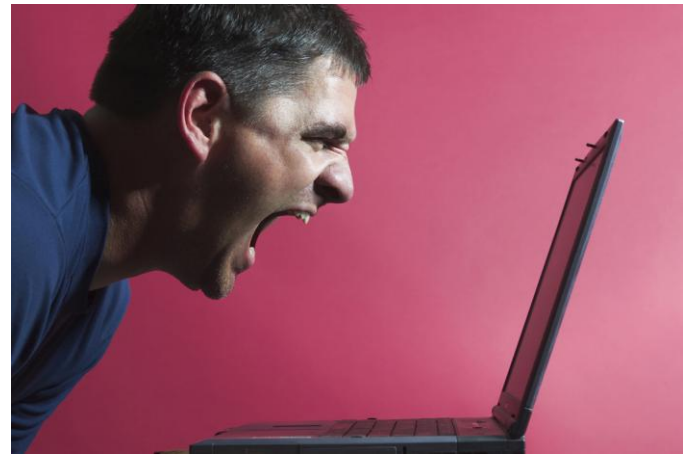
constipation/diarrhea



Some Stress Warning Signals

■ Behavioral Symptoms

excess smoking
bossiness
eating too little or too much
critical attitude of others
short-tempered
procrastination
sleeping too much or too little
driving too fast
grinding of teeth
overuse of alcohol
inability to finish tasks
nail biting
fidgety



Some Stress Warning Signals

■ Emotional Symptoms

bothered by unimportant things
nervousness, anxiety
boredom
edginess
irritable
feeling "burned out"
feeling powerless
crying easily
overwhelming pressure
anger
loneliness
unhappiness, depression
"moodiness"
feeling helpless



Some Stress Warning Signals

- **Cognitive Symptoms**

trouble thinking clearly

difficulty with concentration, focus

forgetfulness

lack of creativity

expecting too much from others

inability to make decisions

constant worry

loss of humor

being self-critical


being pessimistic



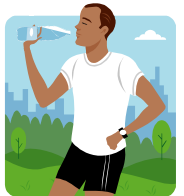
Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Confront the Problem and Devise a Plan**—Try to understand your problems or tasks and come up with a plan, those who know what to do suffer less stress.



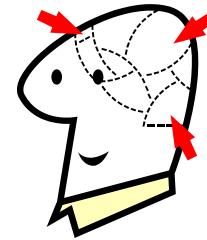
-  **Time Management**—Making good use of your time and planning a schedule helps prevent last minute stress.

- **Physical Activity**—Exercise releases endorphins and other biochemicals that can help relax and calm you.



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Biofeedback to Control Tension**—Recognize how your body reacts to and how to counteract the signs of stress (IE: a tension headache coming on).



- **Humor**—A good sense of humor can distract you from stress and help keep it under control and in perspective.



Ways to Reduce Stress



- **Get enough Sleep**—Getting the proper amount of sleep (8 to 9 hours) can help keep you calm and productive. It can stop the stress before it starts and you will deal better with stress when well rested.
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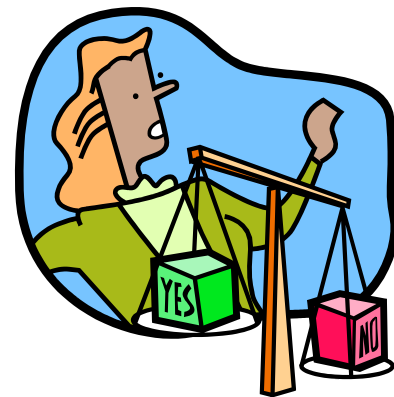
Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Change the What You *Can*, Forget What You *Cannot***—Only you can control and change yourself, but even you can only change certain aspects. Focus on what you can change (organization, time management, hair style, clothing, grades) and pay less attention to what you cannot (teachers, parents, IQ, disability, race, height).

"Life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we react to it." Talk to yourself positively. Remember, "I can handle it, " "this will be over soon," or "I have handled difficult things before, and I can do it again."

Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Learn to say "no."** Learn to pick and choose which things you will say "yes" to and which things you will not. Protect yourself by not allowing yourself to take on every request or opportunity that comes your way. It is okay to decline a request for a favor. Saying "no" does not mean you are bad, self-centered, or uncaring. Learn skills of assertiveness so that you can feel more confident and have effective ways of saying "no."



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Don't Self Medicate**—Occasional aspirin for a headache, nonprescription sleep aids for insomnia, and antacids for indigestion are fine. Avoid illegal drugs and abuse of prescription medications, which can only lead to more trouble.
- **Nutrition**—Getting a balanced diet and regular meals is a must; try to cut back on caffeine (coffee, chocolate, soda) and sugar (candy, soda, chocolate).



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Find a support system-** Find someone to talk with about your feelings and experiences. Speak to friends, family, a teacher, a minister, or a counselor. Sometimes we just need to "vent" or get something "off our chest." Expressing our feelings can be relieving, we can feel supported by others, and it can help us work out our problems



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Don't Try to be Perfect**—Everyone makes mistakes, striving to be perfect (especially the first time) only sets you up for failure and disappointment.



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Get a hobby, do something different-** For a balanced lifestyle, play is as important as work. Leisure activities and hobbies can be very enjoyable and inspiring, and they can offer an added sense of accomplishment to our lives.



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Slow down-** Know your limits and cut down on the number of things you try to do each day, particularly if you do not have enough time for them or for yourself. Be realistic about what you can accomplish effectively each day. Also, monitor your pace. Rushing through things can lead to mistakes or poor performance. Take the time you need to do a good job. Poorly done tasks can lead to added stress.



Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Relaxation**—Rest your mind and body with a good book, music, a hot shower, meditation, stretching, even a nap.



Relaxation Exercises

- Relaxation techniques can help reduce emotional and physical sensations of stress, as well as the worry or stressful thoughts that may accompany them. If you can learn to relax your breathing and reduce your muscle tension, your mind will follow. Conversely, if you can learn to ease stressful thoughts and worry, your body will relax as well.
 - It is highly recommended that you approach learning these exercises as *skills that need to be practiced and developed over time*, rather than as something you can do once in a while. Without practice, these exercises may not be as effective for you at the time you need them most!
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Deep Breathing

- When we feel stressed, it is common for our rate of breathing to increase. We also tend to breath in a shallow manner, more highly in our chest. A deep breathing exercise allows us to take fuller, slower breaths that reflect a true relaxed state.
 - **Slowly take a deep breath. Hold it for a count of four. Then, gently let it all out, letting tensions go as you exhale. Our breathing becomes shallow as we become tense. A deep breath can help more oxygen enter our system, literally breathing more life into ourselves.**
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Deep Breathing

- **Breathing Tensions Away-** Become aware of your feet and legs. As you take in a slow, deep breath, imagine pulling all the tensions in them up into your lungs and expelling these tensions as you gently exhale. Then, with a second deep breath, breathe all the tensions in your trunk, hands and arms and expel them with a gentle exhalation. Then, finish off by collecting all those in your shoulders, neck, and head. With practice, you might be able to collect tensions in your entire body in one deep inhalation and expel them. If you have special tensions in one particular spot, devote one full breath to that spot.
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Visualization

- Visualization involves using imagery to fully immerse ourselves in a pleasant scene, noticing the sights, sounds, smells, and tactile sensations.
 - **Re-create a Favorite Calm Scene-** Take a deep breath. As you let it out, let your eyes close. Focus for a few moments on your breath gently coming in and going out. When you are comfortable, imagine snuggling down in a warm bed, or lying on a beach at a favorite lake, or visualize another scene that is calming and peaceful for you. Notice the sounds, the smells, and other details of the surroundings as if you were actually there. Maintain the feelings of calm throughout the exercise and even afterwards in your other activities.
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Listen to Something Relaxing

- Listen to calming music, or to pre-prepared relaxation or hypnosis tapes. It takes no effort on your behalf to listen to these, and this may be very welcome at the end of a long, hard day's work!



It is up to you to take necessary steps to help manage stress in your life. So, why not take a deep calming breath and start today.



References

- <http://www.scribd.com/doc/83055/Stress-What-You-Need-to-Know>
 - <http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/counseling/workshop/stress/stress01.html>
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