

Introduction

Stress is a normal physical response to events that upset your usual balance. When threatened, your body goes into “fight or flight mode.” (Think of a cave man who is facing a challenge- he had to decide quickly if it was better to stay and fight the stress, or if the danger was too big, such as fighting a saber tooth tiger alone and bare handed, to run for safety. This instinct has followed our development and is commonly referred to as “fight or flight” mode or syndrome) this reaction is stress. Stress is normal and natural and it can increase your performance. Although, when stress gets too high, it can cause issues. When this occurs there is a need for intervention. Interventions can range from self-help to support groups, formal therapy and possibly medications.

Is All Stress Bad?

No, stress in and of itself is not negative nor is it bad for you. In fact a certain level of stress is not only healthy but can help motivate people to work harder, set productive and realistic goals and make achievements that may have been elusive otherwise. An example of positive stress would be when a person is nervous about passing a test so they spend extra time to study: this helps them relax and conversely they will likely do better on the test!

Stress is bad when it reaches the level that it impacts one’s ability to perform normally. Using the example above, excessive stress that results in obsessions over failing and thus prevents effective concentration and the ability to study would be “bad stress” and that would require interventions.

What Employers/Schools Can Do To Help Reduce Stress

What can organizations do to help lower stress:

- Allow employees to utilize stress reduction programs without having formal records or other tracking systems, as this often reduces utilization due to fears of being labeled
- Promote more relaxed work environments.
- Promote growth of workers-focus on their strengths.
- Praise, don’t condemn.
- Offer EAP programming with minimal, if any, formal reporting to the employer.
- Offer stress reduction areas: quiet rooms with softer lighting, soft music, comfortable furniture where employees can go to relax or unwind during break times.
- Promote health and healthy lifestyles.
- Offer in-services geared towards stress reduction, relaxation or related programming.

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STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS



We treat people not privilege...

“Doc Warren”
(Dr. Warren Corson III)
53 Muir Ave.
Bristol, CT. 06010
Phone: (860) 582-7904
Email: docwarren@docwarren.org
On the web:

www.docwarren.org

Effects of Chronic Stress Can Include

- Physical Pain
- Skin Conditions
- Heart Disease
- Compromised Immune System
- Anxiety/Depression
- Concentration/Memory Issues
- Issues Sleeping
- Performance Issues
- Relational Issues
- Sexual Issues
- Weight Issues

Common Stress Triggers

- Job Loss or Retirement
- Accidents
- Loss of Loved One
- Work Demands
- Victimization
- Loss of Home
- Relational Issues
- Divorce
- Sleep Disturbances
- Health Issues or Injury
- Lack of Relaxation Time
- Financial Challenges
- Overworked
- New Child
- Job Reviews
- Exams

Personality Traits Associated With Stress

- Negative Attitude/Self-Deprecation
- Unrealistic Goals/Expectations
- Pessimism
- Needing to be perfect (perfectionism)
- Rigidity
- Overly Passive or Overly Aggressive

Techniques Commonly Used To Reduce Stress At Home, Work or School

-Get Enough Sleep: 6-8 hrs per night is recommended for the average person. Type of work, health issues, stress level etc can affect the amount of time needed.

-Relax/Do Fun Activities: Find balance in your life-dedicate time every day to relax. This not only helps you to recharge but also can help reduce stress and related anxiety.

-Exercise: By working your body, physical tensions can be released, not to mention a reduction in nervous energy. It also serves as a way to get your mind focused on other things.

-Eat Well: Foods that are high in fats, sugars and starches should only be eaten in moderation. A balanced diet contributes to a healthy lifestyle.

-Delegate Responsibility/Set Limits: Learning to set limits in your personal and professional life can help reduce the feelings of being overloaded or overworked. If you have the support in your life, learn to transfer some of your work to others who may be able to assist. At work, if you have the authority, learn to delegate duties-have others help pick up the slack and free you up for the work that you really need to focus on.

-Avoid Excessive Work Loads: Keep workloads reasonable- find a balance between work and rest. 30-40 hrs per week is the average. While increases in hours may be unavoidable at time, resist the urge to consistently exceed 40 hrs per week as this can lead to increased stress for both the body and mind, to say nothing of interpersonal relations.

-Organize Priorities: Beyond setting limits and delegation, learning to properly organize priorities can greatly reduce stress. Schedule projects by importance, give reasonable completion goals and schedule time to complete tasks.

-Limit Caffeine: Too much caffeine can affect the body in many negative ways including the onset of anxiety. Limit caffeine intake by avoiding excessive use of energy drinks, espresso etc. though you do not have to stop using caffeine all together. For best results avoid their use just prior to bed time.

-Visualization/Deep Breathing / Yoga/Stress Reduction Techniques:

Though beyond the scope of this brochure, these techniques offer much in terms of stress reduction. They also can be done just about anywhere. Additional information can be found via Internet search, 211 or through local health and wellness centers.

-Utilize/Develop Support Networks: No person is truly independent, successful people learn to become interdependent- they learn to identify strengths and weaknesses of those they know and to call upon them as needed. Cultivate good, positive friendships and connections and call upon them not only in times of need, but when things are going well. Having a solid network or supports can greatly reduce stress and when stress should occur, to assist in a rapid cessation of symptoms.

-Prepare for Challenges: One of the best defenses from stress is to be prepared for challenges that are likely to occur. Have back up plans in place for such things as financial setbacks, health issues, back up daycare, and other common stressors. Should they occur you will have a plan in place to implement- this will not only assist in times of anxiety but overall stress may be reduced just knowing you are prepared.

-Humor: It's often said that "laughter is the best medicine" and there is much to be said about this mindset. Try not to take yourself or life too seriously. Try to find humor in everyday life. Relax, take a deep breath and try not to be so serious.

When Self Help Is Not Enough

Behavior based treatment: If self help techniques fail or if other issues are affecting you, you may want to consider behaviorally based counseling. This type of counseling focuses on specific behavior patterns and thought processes and helps the client to gain an understanding of how to make lasting changes in a short period of time.

Psychopharmacological intervention: Self help and counseling techniques often assist the client to manage stress and other behavioral issues. There are times however when psychotropic medications may be necessary. Should this be the case, the services of a Psychiatrist may be considered. Your therapist can assist with a referral and follow up consultations as needed.