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What is Stress?

Stress is any change that you must adapt to in our ever changing world. Stress is a demand placed on the body and mind and the body's reaction to it. Everyone experiences stress, it is unavoidable fact of life. Stress can range in intensity from the negative of being in danger to the joy of completing a task on time. All stress is not bad. It is important to identify how you respond to stressful events, in order to deal with them in a healthy way.



1. Assess the current stressors in your life. Make a list of everything that produces stress in your life (ie new job, children, moving, etc.). How do you cope with these stressors? There can be healthy and unhealthy coping styles. For example, healthy ways include exercise and balancing work and play. Unhealthy ways include alcohol use, overeating and procrastination.
2. After identifying the stressors and coping styles, try to modify your behavior. Recognize that while you may not be able to change the stressor, you can change the way you react to the stressor. Practice healthy coping skills daily.

Healthy Coping Skills

1. First recognize which activities are relaxing to you. Examples include: going for walks, meeting with friends, reading for pleasure, listening to music, taking a bath or taking a yoga class.
2. Practice the following relaxation techniques:



Meditation: We choose a quiet place to meditate and sit in a comfortable position. We can sit in the traditional cross-legged posture or in any other position that is comfortable. The most important thing is to keep our back straight to prevent our mind from becoming sluggish or sleepy.

We sit with our eyes partially closed and turn our attention to our breathing. We breathe naturally, preferably through the nostrils, without attempting to control our breath, and we try to become aware of the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. This sensation is our object of meditation. We should try to concentrate on it to the exclusion of everything else.

At first, our mind will be very busy, and we might even feel that the meditation is making our mind busier; but in reality we are just becoming more aware of how busy our mind actually is. There will be a great temptation to follow the different thoughts as they arise, but we should resist this and remain focused single-pointedly on the sensation of the breath. If we discover

that our mind has wandered and is following our thoughts, we should immediately return it to the breath. We should repeat this as many times as necessary until the mind settles on the breath.

Guided Imagery: In this technique, you form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation. Try to use as many senses as you can, including smells, sights, sounds and textures. If you imagine relaxing at the ocean, for instance, think about the warmth of the sun, the sound of crashing waves, the feel of the grains of sand and the smell of salt water. You may want to close your eyes, sit in a quiet spot and loosen any tight clothing.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation In this technique, you focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group. This helps you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation, and you become more aware of physical sensations. You may choose to start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. Tense your muscles for at least five seconds and then relax for 30 seconds, and repeat.

3. Try to incorporate some relaxation time into your daily schedule. Find several techniques which work for you.



Other things you can do to reduce stress

1. Add aerobic exercise such as biking, swimming, walking or jogging.
2. Eat a well balanced diet – don't skip meals.
3. Get an adequate amount of rest each night. Try to stick with an evening routine that is relaxing, and promotes sleep. For example, take a shower, read a book then go to bed – rather than watching television.
4. Reduce your caffeine intake – especially in the afternoon and evenings.
5. Quit smoking. You may think this helps you deal with stress
6. Use time management. Do what needs to be done first, leaving other things for the next day. Write lists, prioritize and avoid procrastination.

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