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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Tackle Stress at Home and at Work To Protect Your Health and Well-being

What's making you feel stressed? It could be caregiving for your parents, taking care of your own children, juggling bills, keeping up with work responsibilities, or all of the above. By doing just a few things differently, you can manage your stress to feel more capable and have more joy in your life.

Life is stressful by its very nature and almost all of us feel stressed at some point. The most common causes are work, money and family.¹ It doesn't have to be a crisis that creates stress; it's often the day-to-day physical demands and emotions that come with coping with life's challenges.

Other situations that cause

stress include pregnancy, change, retirement and social isolation.¹ Sometimes it's just too much happening at once between work, family and personal responsibilities. And, of course, the holidays add stress – with extra time spent with family, lack of exercise, too many activities and memories of happier holidays.

Why Bother about Stress?

When stress builds up, it can damage your mood, interfere with your sleep, lower your concentration and negatively affect your relationships – pretty much everything we humans need to thrive and feel

good. Stress can even harm your physical and mental health.²

What Can You Do?

We can't always remove or control the outside factors that cause stress, but we can learn to change our reactions to these situations and cope with them more effectively. It doesn't require giant changes in lifestyle, just changing our mindset a bit and adding a few new activities.

If you can learn to manage stress, you'll feel better, be more productive, have better health and enjoy life more.

Watch for these Signs of Stress

Stress, in small doses, can help us perform at a higher level. It gives us energy, helps our muscles get ready for action and makes our heart beat faster.³ However, when stress levels get too high or persist too long, they can lead to serious problems.

Symptoms of too much stress include:³

- Fatigue and headaches
- Loss of concentration
- Inability to control anger
- Increased use of alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes or drugs
- Increased or decreased eating

If you have any of these signs, it's time to take action to reduce your stress. In the long term stress can lead to:³

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease and stroke
- Decreased immune defenses
- Cancer
- Stomach problems
- Mental health problems like depression and anxiety disorders

Upcoming Articles

February 2011
Healthy Food Therapy

March 2011
Sleep Your Way to Better Mental Health

Seven Ways to Manage Your Stress

Take a look at these activities that can help you manage stress – and try them on for size. Not all will be a perfect fit, but we think you'll find a few that suit your personality and lifestyle.

1. Avoid controllable stressors.⁴

Control stressful situations whenever you can. One way is to avoid them completely. For example, if going shopping with your spouse makes you feel stressed, then agree not to shop together.

2. Realize your limitations.⁴

Learn that it's okay to say "No" to new responsibilities that you're not sure you can successfully take on. It's much better to decline a new commitment than to find out part way into it, that you can't accomplish it. Saying "No" is healthier for you and also fairer to other people involved.

3. Share your thoughts and feelings.⁴

Talk to your spouse, a parent or a friend about your feelings and ask for their advice. Then consider their suggestions.

Because they have a new perspective, they may think of a way out of your stressful situation that you haven't thought of.

4. Exercise.⁴ Exercise really does matter – in preventing and managing stress! Find the exercise you like, so you'll be motivated to keep doing it, and start by exercising every other day for at least 30 minutes. Check with your doctor before you start. You don't have to spend lots of money; walk in the mall, dance to your favorite music or garden more vigorously.

5. Eat and sleep well.⁴ Getting a good night's sleep and eating a healthy diet can help you lead a healthier lifestyle; and this helps to reduce stress.

- Almost everyone knows that good nutrition helps us feel our physical best. But did you know that healthy eating is also crucial to our mental health? Feed your brain with the right foods and you'll think

more clearly, be in a better mood and feel less stressed.³

- Experts suggest that most adults get seven to nine hours of sleep a night.³ If you're not getting that much, you may feel stressed. Schedule your sleep: set a regular bedtime and stick to it. Avoid beverages with caffeine starting six to eight hours before bed.

6. Make a date with yourself.⁴ Too few of us spend pleasurable time doing what we want to do. If you like to laugh, read a humorous book or see the newest comedy. If you're creative, take time to sing, paint or cook a new recipe. If you're a nature lover, go for a hike.

7. Help others.⁴ When you help others, it's good for your mental health! Join an organization to volunteer or do something positive close to home – grocery shopping for a neighbor or driving her to doctors' appointments.

Coping with stress isn't always easy. But you don't have to go it alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

(See Resources.)



Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

- Visit the "Coping with Stress" Life Stages Center for strategies and resources to manage stress.

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1 Johns Hopkins Health Information. "Causes of Stress." <https://www.liveandworkwell.com/member/lifestage/article.asp?articleID=12929&id=4&page=1&cond=0>. Accessed August 24, 2010.

2 Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association). Attitudinal Survey, December 2006.

3 Mental Health America. "Are You Feeling Stressed Out." <http://www.nmha.org/go/mhny/2009/stress>. Accessed July 7, 2010.

4 The Patient Education Institute. "Managing Stress: Reference Summary" 2007. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/managingstress/hp069102.pdf>. Accessed August 24, 2010.