

STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension.

How much pain they have cost us, the evils which have never happened.

Stress is a normal part of life. In small quantities, stress is good—it can motivate you and help you be more productive. However, too much stress, or a strong response to stress, is harmful. Persistent and unrelenting stress often leads to anxiety and unhealthy behaviors like overeating and abuse of alcohol or drugs.

Stress symptoms may be affecting your health, even though you might not realize it. You may think illness is to blame for that nagging headache, your frequent forgetfulness or your decreased productivity at work. But sometimes stress is to blame. Indeed, stress symptoms can affect your body, your thoughts and feelings, and your behavior. When you recognize common stress symptoms, you can take steps to manage them.

The subjective nature of stress

Stress can occur when:

- workload or pressures are high
- control over the workload or pressures is limited
- support is insufficient

However, it is important to emphasize that stress *per se* is not bad, but as the general adaptation syndrome illustrates, the key is the duration for which it is applied and the individual's perception of how they think they can cope. There is a three-way relationship between:

- the demands on an individual
- the individual's feelings about those demands
- the individual's ability to cope with those demands

Effects of stress

On your body	On your thoughts and feelings	On your behavior
<input type="checkbox"/> Headache	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Over eating
<input type="checkbox"/> Back pain	<input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness	<input type="checkbox"/> Under eating
<input type="checkbox"/> Chest pain	<input type="checkbox"/> Worrying	<input type="checkbox"/> Angry outbursts
<input type="checkbox"/> Heart disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritability	<input type="checkbox"/> Drug or alcohol abuse
<input type="checkbox"/> Heart palpitations	<input type="checkbox"/> Depression	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased smoking
<input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure	<input type="checkbox"/> Sadness	<input type="checkbox"/> Social withdrawal
<input type="checkbox"/> Decreased immunity	<input type="checkbox"/> Anger	<input type="checkbox"/> Crying spells
<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach upset	<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling insecure	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship conflicts
<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of focus	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Burnout	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness	

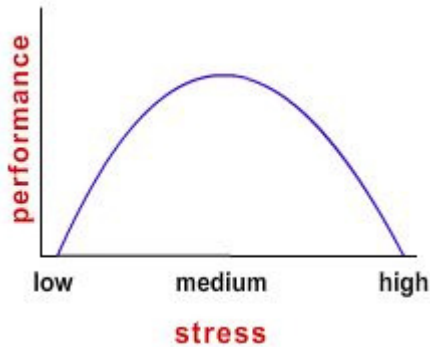
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The benefits of stress in moderation

A certain degree of stress is necessary to perform well and maintain enthusiasm for life. No stress at all can lead to boredom, while too much stress for too long will lead to exhaustion and burnout.

This would correspond with the **Yerkes-Dodson law**, which describes an inverted U-shaped curve between physiological/mental arousal and performance levels. This concept can also be extended to the concept of stress:



STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress management involves controlling and reducing the tension that occurs in stressful situations by making emotional and physical changes. The degree of stress and the desire to make the changes will determine how much change takes place.

The process involves:

1. Learning to interpret the causes of your stress.
2. Learning to reactivate your body's natural stress-reduction system.

WHAT WE PRACTICE, WE GET GOOD AT.

AN INDIVIDUAL STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM:

It involves the following areas:

a) Attitude:

A person's attitude can influence whether or not a situation or emotion is stressful. A person with a negative attitude will often report more stress than would someone with a positive attitude.

It is not the event, but rather our interpretation of it that causes our emotional reactions. And major threat to our physical and mental health in the modern life is no longer outside us.

The most important story of all is the one you tell yourself about yourself and your life—the story of you and what you have thought of your limitations are just a story you tell yourself and you can change that story by adopting the right attitude which can convert a negative stress into a positive one. The person who has the most flexibility in his thinking and behavior will be the most influential person.

If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment by taking the following steps:

*Make an effort to stop negative thoughts.

- Plan some fun. Humor is one of your most valuable recourses, so it's helpful to find opportunities to make a laugh and increase your levels of endorphins—your natural pain killers.
- Refocus the negative into the positive.
- Take a break.
- Think positively.

Examples of typical negative self-talk and how you might apply a positive twist include:

Negative self-talk	Positive spin
I've never done it before	It's an opportunity to learn something new
It's too complicated	I'll tackle it from a different angle
I don't have the resources	Necessity is the mother of invention
I'm too lazy to get this done	I wasn't able to fit it into my schedule but can re-examine some priorities
There's no way it will work	I can try to make it work
It's too radical a change	Let's take a chance
No one bothers to communicate with me	I'll see if I can open the channels of communication
I'm not going to get any better at this	I'll give it another try

The more ways at looking at something you have, the more choices you have; and the more choices you have, the more likely to get the control on your problem solving skills and abilities and enhance your self esteem.

b) Relaxation:

People with no outside interests, hobbies, or ways to relax may be unable to handle stressful situations because they have no outlet for their stress.

If you want to know what your thoughts were like yesterday, check how your body feels today.

Relaxation is achieved by getting the control of our stress response and learning to increase the frequency and depth of our natural relaxation. In the same way as the anchor of a boat helps keep it steady in the midst of stormy areas, an emotional anchor helps us to stay calm in the midst of our stressful daily life, so Relaxation is a CALM ANCHOR.

- Learn about and try using one or more of the many relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery, listening to music, or practicing yoga or meditation. One or more of these techniques should work for you.
- Listen to your body.
- Take a mini retreat.
- Take time for personal interests and hobbies.

c) Physical Activity:

Not getting enough physical activity can put the body in a stressful state. Physical activity has many benefits. A regular physical activity program can help decrease depression, if it exists. It also improves the feeling of well-being.

Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it.

Taking regular exercise helps you to build muscle, lose fat and feel great. It contributes to clearer and brighter skin, enhanced mental clarity, better work performance and concentration, as well as an improved sex

drive. Certain hormones released during exercise have been shown to slow and even reverse the ageing process. But when we are talking about controlling stress, the goal is not to get fit—it is get fit for life—it is all about how it makes you feel.

- Start a physical activity program. Most experts recommend doing 20 minutes of aerobic activity three times per week.
- Decide on a specific time, type, amount, and level of physical activity. Fit this time into your schedule so it can be part of your routine.
- Find a buddy to exercise with—it is more fun and it will encourage you to stick with your routine.
- You do not have to join a gym—20 minutes of brisk walking outdoors will do the trick.

d) Sleep:

If you want to be a peak performer in any areas of your life, you have to find out the ways to renew your energy—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Our body's energy system works best when we turn them on as brightly as we can and then turn them off again. This is a principle of oscillation—periods of energy expenditure followed by periods of energy recovery.

Life is not a marathon—it is a series of sprints.

By alternating between periods of intense activity and periods of gentle activity and rest with good sleep hygiene, you can develop your strength and stamina and become more fully engaged with life, you will awake feeling refreshed and with better concentration afterwards.

Follow the steps/rules of good sleep hygiene and avoid use of any sleeping pills.

Sleep Hygiene—*"The Healthy Habits of Good Sleep"*.

Good "hygiene" is anything that helps you to have a healthy life. The idea behind sleep hygiene is the



same as dental hygiene. Dental hygiene helps you stay healthy by keeping your teeth and gums clean and strong. Sleep hygiene helps you stay healthy by keeping your mind and body rested and strong. Following these tips will help you sleep better and feel your best.

Dental hygiene can even be a part of your sleep hygiene. It is easier for you to fall asleep at night if you have bedtime "rituals". These are things that you do every night just before going to bed. Brushing and flossing your teeth is a good example of this kind of ritual. Both your dentist and your doctor will approve if you do this every night.

Here are some tips for how you can improve your sleep hygiene:

1. Don't go to bed unless you are sleepy.
If you are not sleepy at bedtime, then do something else. Read a book, listen to soft music or browse through a magazine. Find something relaxing, but not stimulating, to take your mind off of worries about sleep. This will relax your body and distract your mind.
2. If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, then get out of the bed.
Find something else to do that will make you feel relaxed. If you can, do this in another room. Your bedroom should be where you go to sleep. It is not a place to go when you are bored. Once you feel sleepy again, go back to bed.
3. Begin rituals that help you relax each night before bed.
This can include such things as a warm bath, light snack or a few minutes of reading.
4. Get up at the same time every morning.
Do this even on weekends and holidays.
5. Get a full night's sleep on a regular basis.
Get enough sleep so that you feel well-rested nearly every day.
6. Avoid taking naps if you can.
If you must take a nap, try to keep it short (less than one hour). Never take a nap after 3 p.m.
7. Keep a regular schedule.
Regular times for meals, medications, chores, and other activities help keep the inner body clock running smoothly.
8. Don't read, write, eat, watch TV, talk on the phone, or play cards in bed.
9. Do not have any caffeine after lunch.
10. Do not have a beer, a glass of wine, or any other alcohol within six hours of your bedtime.
11. Do not have a cigarette or any other source of nicotine before bedtime.
12. Do not go to bed hungry, but don't eat a big meal near bedtime either.
13. Avoid any tough exercise within six hours of your bedtime.
You should exercise on a regular basis, but do it earlier in the day. (Talk to your doctor before you begin an exercise program.)
14. Avoid sleeping pills, or use them cautiously.
Most doctors do not prescribe sleeping pills for periods of more than three weeks. Do not drink alcohol while taking sleeping pills.
15. Try to get rid of or deal with things that make you worry.
If you are unable to do this, then find a time during the day to get all of your worries out of your system. Your bed is a place to rest, not a place to worry.
16. Make your bedroom quiet, dark, and a little bit cool.
An easy way to remember this: it should remind you of a cave. While this may not sound romantic, it seems to work for bats. Bats are champion sleepers. They get about 16 hours of sleep each day. Maybe it's because they sleep in dark, cool caves.

e) Support Systems:

Everyone needs someone in their life they can rely on when they are having a hard time. Having little or no support makes stressful situations even more difficult to deal with. Sometimes the difference that makes the difference is not looking at the situation in different way, but rather looking at it with different eyes.

So think about someone, either real or imaginary who is good at problem solving and sorting things out and take a few moments to

imagine yourself seeing the world and situation through your hero's eyes and then act on your insights you may get through this process.

- Make an effort to interact socially with people. Even though you feel stressed, you will be glad to meet your friends, if only to get your mind off things.
- Nurture yourself and others.
- Reach out to other people.

f) Spiritual connection:

We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves. Unless you deliberately cultivate your inner resources, you will never find the peace of mind that we all crave in one way or another. Every stressful emotion is like a signal from your mind telling you there's something to pay attention to in your world.

Certain tools to reduce stress are very tangible: exercising more, eating healthy foods and talking with friends. But there is another tool for helping you manage difficult times that can be just as beneficial, albeit harder to pin down—embracing your spirituality.

The most powerful shift you can make in your perception is to step inside or outside of your internal imager, either a thought or memory by the process of dissociation and mastering which will not only instantly reduce your stress but give you a greater sense of freedom and control in your life.

As we learn to associate into more and more of our positive memories and dissociate from the negative, we increase our well being, reduce our stress and get a completely different perspective on our lives.

Spirituality begins with your relationship with yourself, is nurtured by your relationships with others and culminates in a sense of purpose in life. Realizing this, two of the best ways to cultivate your spirituality are to improve your self-esteem and to foster relationships with those who are important to you. This can lead to a deepened sense of your place in life and in the greater good.

Staying connected to your inner spirit and the lives of those around you can enhance your quality of life, both mentally and physically.

Remember that spirituality is a dynamic process and a constantly evolving internal journey. Your personal concept of spirituality may change with your age and life experiences, but it always forms the basis of your well-being, helps you maintain a reasonable stress level and affirms your purpose in life.

Spirituality has many benefits. It can help you:

- Focus on personal goals. Cultivating your spirituality may help uncover what's most meaningful in your life. By clarifying what's most important, you can focus less on the unimportant things and eliminate stress.
- Connect to the world. The more you feel you have a purpose in the world, the less solitary you feel—even when you're alone. This can lead to a valuable inner peace during difficult times.
- Release control. When you feel part of a greater whole, you realize that you aren't responsible for everything that happens in life. You can share the burden of tough times as well as the joys of life's blessings with those around you.
- Expand your support network. Whether you find spirituality in a mosque or home, in your family, or in walks with a friend through nature, this sharing of spiritual expression can help build relationships.
- Lead a healthier life. People who consider themselves spiritual may be better able to cope with stress and heal from illness or addiction faster.

IN SUMMARY

Win control over the stress in your life.

Stress management strategies may include:

- Exercise
- Relaxation techniques
- Fostering healthy friendships
- Getting plenty of sleep
- Professional counseling or psychotherapy

The payoff of managing stress is peace of mind and—perhaps—a longer, healthier life.

A number of simple changes you can make that will allow you more time to relax, and just be happy without having to give up any of the activities, people or things and which make a positive difference in your life.

The only true measure of success is the amount of joy you are feeling and the most powerful tool in our attempt to reboot our natural joy system is also the simplest—making a list of all the things which we appreciate, are grateful for or bring us joy. The power of appreciation/gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues but the parents of all.

STAY MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY HEALTHY:

1. Maintain good SLEEP HYGINE (Nature's Restorer)
2. Manage STRESS (Breathe and Relax)
3. Exercise (Aerobics, Yoga, Swimming, Walking etc.)
4. Loosen up at Work (Breathe, Stretch and Move)
5. Go Forward Slowly BUT Consistently (Realistic Expectation)
6. Nutrition (food as fuel), Carbo-hydrates and fats are vital for energy, not vitamins or minerals.

*Take *LOW GLYCEMIC INDEX CARBO-HYDRATES*

(Fruits, Canned Beans, Any grainy bread, Nuts)

*Boost *GOOD FATS*

(Monounsaturated Fats—Canola oil, Olive oil, Avocado, Nuts, low fat spreads)

(Omega-6 Polyunsaturated Fats—Soy oil, Nuts)

(Omega-3 Polyunsaturated Fats—Seafood, Fish, Soy oil, Canola oil, Nuts, Flaxseed)

*Increase *SOLUBLE FIBRE*

(Grains, Fruits, Vegetables)

*Good *FOOD FOR BLOOD*

(Fruits, Green Vegetables, Red Meat, Fish, Poultry, Tea, Fortified Cereals, Liver, Onions, Garlic, Ginger, Nuts, Milk, Cheese, Eggs, Olive Oil, Whole meal Bread, Pulses)

7. Mental Ease (A HEALTHY MIND in a HEALTHY BODY)

By medication and/or Alternative Therapies.

REFERENCES

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