

Handling Stress

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Stress-related disorders are becoming the norm. Surviving workplace change in a deepening climate of uncertainty is affecting all of us. Skills and insights are needed to maintain a stable inner world when it can often appear that the outside world is out of control. How can you strive and thrive in the challenges facing us in our busy worlds? Handling stress requires a personal approach. People perceive and manage situations differently. What is positive stimulation for one person is highly stressful for another; therefore, individual insights and strategies for stress-handling effectiveness are required.

WHAT IS STRESS?

A definition of stress could be thought of as the demands and pressures in our lives. These demands and pressures can come from a threat, such as rising expenses or changes in government regulations that affect our security. They can come from a challenge, such as an increase in our work load during peak times, or changes in the technology that we have to work through. They can even come from a pleasure, such as the birth of a baby, buying a new house, or getting a promotion.

No matter where the demands or pressures come from, any change affects your energy and ultimately your health because change requires your body to adapt. You only have so much energy available and when you are adapting to new, challenging, or threatening situations, your energy levels are reduced. For example, a friend of mine complained about her husband and said that they just didn't get along. When I asked her why she did not just leave him, she replied wisely, that she just couldn't handle any more change in her life.

WHAT MAKES STRESS NEGATIVE?

Stress management is not about "putting a lid" on the pressure. Stress management is about re-directing the pressure into something positive. Good stress is thought to be just enough pressure in our lives to create a productive and stimulating life. The Greeks called this type of stress, Eustress or Good Stress. Bad or negative stress is when the pressure in our lives goes on for too long, is too much, and happens too often. This throws the body/mind balance out of kilter and leads to poor health.

Your body responds to demanding situations by registering them as a fear response. The fear response revs up the body by producing and pouring more chemicals such as adrenalin into the system preparing you to be on alert. When on alert, your heart rate, blood pressure, stomach acid, and blood sugar goes up as the flow of blood goes to the extremities in order to increase the body's ability to either fight or take flight. If you stay in this alert state too long, too much or too often, poor health will follow and lead to

imbalances in the body which can lead to dis-eases such as diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, bad cholesterol levels, or hypertension.

While in the alert state, what does go down in our body systems is the activity in the internal organs such as in our digestive track. This slowing down in the digestive tract could lead to an increase in waste products in the colon which can create constipation, for example. Constipation and the back-up of waste products eventually affects some of the other systems in the body such as the respiratory system or the circulatory system as they become sluggish -- all of which contributes to imbalances and an increase in the likelihood of more poor health.

This alert state triggering the fight or flight response worked well when we were cave people and the demands and pressures were physical but today our demands and pressures are more psychological. We worry too much, take on too much to do and overload ourselves with activity. In today's workplace, because of the flow of information coming at us at such speed, we find ourselves having too much to do and respond to in too short a time period; all of which places undue stress on us as we continuously strive to cope and adapt.

BECOME MORE AWARE

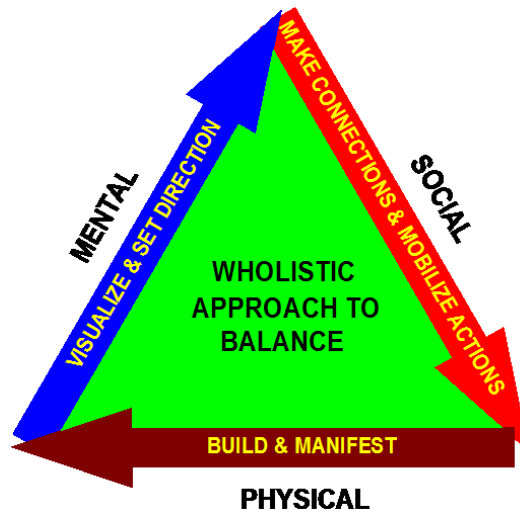
An important point about stress, tension, demands and pressures on our systems is that the build up from these imbalances is accumulative. That means that the more stress and tension we have, the more we feel it in our bodies and the quicker additional stress is added. Your body systems act as a rubber band. If you continue to stretch it, it will eventually snap. What is your body trying to tell you about your demands, pressures and stress?

Think of your body as a wholistic system composed of a mental side, a social side and physical side, each side is of equal importance. Each side must be strong in order to function as it should. If one side of the system is affected, it affects the whole system.

On the mental side, you do your thinking, get your ideas, and develop your expectations about life.

On the social side, you connect, coordinate, and communicate with others.

On the physical side, your body tells you about your limitations and your parameters as you strive to work within the limitations of the real world. In the real world is where the rubber hits the road as you only have so much time, so many resources, and so much energy and you have to learn how to use what you have effectively and efficiently in order to manifest the best results in your life.



Many of us don't recognize early warning signs and symptoms of stress when they occur. Thinking of yourself as a wholistic system, take a look at some of the symptoms listed and check off the symptoms you are currently experiencing. Add others that are not on this list when you answer the question: "Where does stress show up for me?"

MENTAL SYMPTOMS	SOCIAL SYMPTOMS	PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS
<input type="checkbox"/> Confusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritability	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased heart rate
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of concentration	<input type="checkbox"/> Anger	<input type="checkbox"/> Rapid breathing
<input type="checkbox"/> Discouragement	<input type="checkbox"/> Losing temper often	<input type="checkbox"/> Tense muscles
<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disorders	<input type="checkbox"/> Nervousness	<input type="checkbox"/> Constipation/Diarrhoea
<input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing	<input type="checkbox"/> Jumpy	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased blood pressure
<input type="checkbox"/> Headache	<input type="checkbox"/> Fear	<input type="checkbox"/> Tight neck & shoulders
<input type="checkbox"/> Worry	<input type="checkbox"/> Impatience	<input type="checkbox"/> Overeating
<input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Unusual bouts of crying	<input type="checkbox"/> Pounding heart
<input type="checkbox"/> Apathy	<input type="checkbox"/> Low self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase in alcohol
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in sleep patterns	<input type="checkbox"/> Inactivity	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase in smoking
<input type="checkbox"/> Pessimism	<input type="checkbox"/> Reckless driving	<input type="checkbox"/> Chest pain
<input type="checkbox"/> Nervous tics	<input type="checkbox"/> Depression	<input type="checkbox"/> Teeth grinding

___ Disappointment	___ Withdraw from others	___ Upset stomach
___ Disillusioned	___ Often create conflicts	___ Fatigue
___ Overly Judgemental	___ Argumentative	___ Drug use
___ Overly opinionated	___ Non-cooperative	___ Rashes
___ Aloof	___ Lacking in consideration	___ Unwanted Weight Gain/Loss
___	___	___
___	___	___

HOW TO COUNTERACT NEGATIVE STRESS

Once you understand your personal responses to the demands and pressures in your life, you can learn where and how to create balance by becoming proactive through individualized work-life stress mastery techniques. Applying techniques that help you in meaningful ways to address your imbalance will, in turn, help in returning your body back to health and your mind back to happiness.

With signs of negative stress, you have to look for alternatives to situations that affect you negatively. The first step is always self awareness and once you are aware and understand where stress is affecting you, you can look for techniques to help address that situation. Following are some techniques to counteract accumulative negative stress and pressure:

1. One important technique to apply to counteract negative stress is to tap into the relaxation response. The relaxation response puts our bodies/minds in a rest and repair state. By sitting quietly for 10 minutes and focusing on our breath for example, we can slow our body down and calm our mind. This rest and repair state is also accumulative, which means the more we relax, the more relaxed we feel and the quicker we can relax. You need the balance between too much stimulation and not enough stimulation and you need to find just the right balance that works for you.
2. The second important technique is being your own locus of control, which means that you are in control of your own destiny, health, and happiness. Identify what you can control and what is outside of your control. If something is outside of your control, be careful how you are thinking about it. Are you seeing yourself as a victim? If you are in a situation in which you have no control, strive to put a positive spin on it until it can change. Ask yourself what you can learn about yourself in this situation. For example, ask yourself while in this situation, can you increase your

tolerance or patience with it and in doing so you can use the situation as an enlightenment exercise. Why not? It is for your own good.

Giving your control to an external power is having the perspective that you are the product of outside forces and are being greatly influenced by either an outdated mode of thinking, by your friends and family, or by some environmental condition. External control is often viewed as being subjected to powerful others or being victims of chance of luck.

We have the power to choose our attitude about anything that life has to offer. Always strive to be the cause and force that drives your life. Alter what you can, avoid what you can, and accommodate what you can, but do these things because you say so and not because others demand it of you.

To be in more control of your life requires that you become less concerned about hurting other people's feelings. Learning to say no can help you improve your self-esteem and avoid being taken advantage of by others. You can say no constructively by saying, "yes, I would love to help you but today my schedule is fully booked today." Learn to say no and eliminate stressful situations where and when you can.

3. Additional things you can do are to:
 - a) Create rituals in your life such as daily meditation or taking time to reflect.
 - b) Exercise at the same time each day.
 - c) Stick to your priorities and do what is important to you by acting on those priorities.
 - d) Develop hobbies.
 - e) Learn something different.
 - f) Plan something creative to do with others.
 - g) Introduce a better diet into your body and reduce alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco.
 - h) Avoid loud noises.
 - i) Stop negative self-talk or at least when you hear yourself saying these negative things that come from deep inside us, just say the following: ***thanks for sharing.***
 - j) Turn worries into stepping stones.

HANDLING STRESS -- MY BEST SUGGESTION

And the most important thing to remember is that your desires are always present. These desires are always seeking manifestation. Be sure to desire positive, creative and productive things. Do not do things to not die -- do things to enjoy living. Maybe as a by-product, you will not die.

