



Stress Management Techniques

Your Body and Stress

A great deal of research suggests that exposure to long-term stress can harm your body. Chronic stress influences high blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, gastro-intestinal issues, headaches, and fatigue. You can avoid or ease the negative effects of stress through relaxation techniques as well as working with a stress specialist.

The *first step in dealing with stress* is recognizing when it is occurring. There are three basic components of stress: Physiological, Behavioral, and Cognitive.

Signs of Physical Stress:

- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Heart racing
- Increased perspiration
- Nausea or stomachache
- Headache
- Increased muscle tension
- Backache
- Tightness in chest

Signs of Behavioral Stress:

- Increase in conflicts with others
- Emotional sensitivity
- Loss of patience (becoming irritable or short-tempered)
- Rushing, being careless or forgetful
- Change in eating or sleeping habits
- Use of substances such as alcohol or medications

Signs of Cognitive Stress:

- Difficulty with concentration or easily distracted
- Intense or intrusive worry
- A tendency towards negative, self-defeating or perfectionistic thinking
- “Worst-case” scenario thinking

Managing your Stress

Once aware of your stress, it is helpful to identify situations or experiences that typically evoke tension or worry. An effective way of pinpointing stressors is by keeping a stress diary in which stressful situations are recorded as they occur. This process will involve you being aware of your individual physiological, behavioral, and cognitive signs of stress. By increasing your awareness to your stress patterns you can begin to formulate a plan to reduce the level of stress in your life.

Stress-Busting Tips:

- ✓ **Set realistic, clear goals and prioritize your time.** Evaluate your goals periodically, and have the flexibility to modify them when appropriate. If you find yourself overly stressed, consider letting go of some of the activities that you are only doing because you feel like you “should”
- ✓ **Try new approaches to problems.** Try tackling one issue at a time and break larger tasks into smaller, more attainable goals. Develop assertiveness by being more direct and clear when asking for what you need and delegate responsibilities
- ✓ **Adopt a balanced attitude about both failures and successes.** Recognize that disappointing and negative experiences are a natural part of the cycles of life. Use these times as opportunities for growth, and to reaffirm values and break unhealthy patterns
- ✓ **Don’t ‘drift along’ in troublesome or emotionally draining relationships.** Take steps to resolve these problems, or consider ending a relationship that is causing you distress. Surrounding yourself with a positive and uplifting support network will help you cope with stress in a healthy way
- ✓ **Focus on fulfilling relationships.** Helping others is a great way to gain perspective over your own problems and keep you feeling energized
- ✓ **Find time every day for some sort of relaxation or fun.** This could include watching your favorite show, exercising, laughing with a friend, or spending much needed time alone
- ✓ **Take care of your body.** Exercise regularly, eat a healthy, balanced diet and avoid excess caffeine and alcohol. Try incorporating a relaxation practice into your daily routine such as deep abdominal breathing or muscle relaxation
- ✓ **Decrease negative self-talk.** Actively challenge negative thoughts when they arise by asking yourself how realistic these thoughts really are. Paying attention to the good things that are happening and focusing on your accomplishments can help you feel more balanced and grounded
- ✓ **Ask for help when you need it.** Reducing your stress isn’t easy, and sometimes a little help goes a long way. Part of your strength is identifying resources available to you, and knowing when to ask for help when you need it most

Many people find it comforting to work with a therapist through this time of transition and change. For more information about stress-busting habits, or to schedule a consultation with a therapist, call Therapy Changes at 619-275-2286 or visit us at www.TherapyChanges.com.