

STRESS MANAGEMENT

IT CANNOT BE ELIMINATED, BUT IT CAN BE MANAGED

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the "wear and tear" our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment; it has physical and emotional effects on us and can create positive or negative feelings. As a positive influence, stress can help compel us to action; it can result in a new awareness and an exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems such as headaches, upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. With the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a job promotion, or a new relationship, we experience stress as we readjust our lives. In so adjusting to different circumstances, stress will help or hinder us depending on how we react to it.

HOW CAN I ELIMINATE STRESS FROM MY LIFE?

Positive stress adds anticipation and excitement to life, and we all thrive under a certain amount of stress. Deadlines, competitions, confrontations, and even our frustrations and sorrows add depth and enrichment to our lives. Our goal is not to eliminate stress but to learn how to manage it and how to use it to help us. Insufficient stress acts as a depressant and may leave us feeling bored or dejected; on the other hand, excessive stress may leave us feeling "tied up in knots." What we need to do is find the optimal level of stress, which will individually motivate but not overwhelm each of us.

FIVE TIPS TO DE-STRESS

1. Forgive Someone

A recent study found that those people who forgive others tended to have -- you guessed it: lower blood pressure than their less-forgiving peers.

2. Religion

Some studies have suggested that people who find comfort in religion have lower blood pressure than those who use alternate stress relievers.

3. Sleep

About 60 percent of people who are stressed say they don't get enough sleep. If falling asleep is your trouble, it's time to start a calming bed time routine.

4. Vacation

Can't find the time or money to plan a lounge on the beach for a week? All that's necessary is that you spend an extended period of time not thinking about those things -- work, money, relationships -- that are making you crazy.

5. Yoga

Even one yoga class can cut levels of the stress hormone cortisol -- reason enough to get you to find an hour each week. Discounts are available on our website: www.avmed.org.

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HOW CAN I TELL WHAT IS OPTIMAL STRESS FOR ME?

There is no single level of stress that is optimal for all people. We are all individual creatures with unique requirements. As such, what is distressing to one may be a joy to another. Even when we agree that a particular event is distressing, we are likely to differ in our physiological and psychological responses to it.

It has been found that most illness is related to unrelieved stress. If you are experiencing stress symptoms, you have gone beyond your optimal stress level; you need to reduce the stress in your life and/or improve your ability to manage it.

HOW CAN I MANAGE STRESS?

Identifying unrelieved stress and being aware of its effect on our lives is not sufficient for reducing its harmful effects. Just as there are many sources of stress, there are many possibilities for its management. However, all require work toward change: changing the source of stress and/or changing your reaction to it. How do you proceed?

1. Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions.

- Notice your distress.
- Don't ignore it.
- Don't gloss over your problems.

2. Recognize what you can change.

- Can you change your stressors by avoiding or eliminating them completely?
- Can you reduce their intensity (manage them over a period of time instead of on a daily or weekly basis)?
- Can you shorten your exposure to stress (take a break, leave the physical area)?
- Can you devote the time and energy necessary to making a change?

3. Reduce the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress.

- Are you expecting to please everyone?
- Try to temper your excess emotions.
- Are you overreacting and viewing things as absolutely critical and urgent?
- Try to see the stress as something you can cope with rather than something that overpowers you.

4. Learn to moderate your physical reactions to stress.

- Slow, deep breathing will bring your heart rate and respiration back to normal.
- Relaxation techniques can reduce muscle tension.

5. Build your physical reserves.

- Exercise for cardiovascular fitness three to four times a week.
- Maintain your ideal weight.
- Avoid nicotine, excessive caffeine, and other stimulants.
- Mix leisure with work. Take breaks and get away when you can.
- Get enough sleep. Be as consistent with your sleep schedule as you can.

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www.avmed.org

American Institute of Stress

<http://www.stress.org>

American Psychological Assoc.

<http://www.apahelpcenter.org>

About Stress

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