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A Little Stress Is Normal
Stress can be good when it helps you rise to challenges.
• It can help you face threats and act quickly in an emergency.
• Stress can also sharpen your abilities and help you perform better.

But Too Much Stress Can Harm You
Here are some problems that stress can worsen or even cause:
• Tiredness or exhaustion.
• Poor concentration or memory.
• Difficulty making decisions.
• Headache, sweating, nervousness.
• Frequent colds.
• Eating or sleeping problems.
• Abdominal cramps or nausea.
• Mood swings, irritability, impatience, short temper and anger.
• Anxiety, worry, fear and depression.
• High blood pressure, chest pains, heart disease, heart attack, stroke.

It is normal to feel overly stressed sometimes. No one lives a stress-free life. The challenge is to manage stress so it doesn’t dominate your life.

What Causes Stress?
Both little things and big things count.
• Normal, everyday problems: commuting delays, computer problems, misplacing things, other people’s bad moods.
• Specific situations: public speaking, a job interview, a blind date, work deadlines.
• Significant life events: marriage, divorce, a new baby, a new job, moving, a serious illness, the death of someone close.
• Other problems: family problems, relationship problems, financial worries, trouble on the job.

People respond differently to stress.
• A situation that makes YOU anxious may not bother someone else at all. Some people thrive on deadlines, for example. Others are paralyzed by them.
• Something that worries you a lot at first may be much less stressful later. The first day on a new job can be hard. A couple of weeks later, you will probably be much more comfortable.

Healthy Ways to Cope
Taking even one of these steps can help you manage stress.

1. Get plenty of sleep.
• Have a regular sleep schedule. When you’re rested you have more energy to deal with stressful events.
• If caffeine keeps you awake at night, cut down on coffee, soda and other caffeine-containing drinks.
• Nicotine can also keep you awake. For free help to quit smoking, call 311.

2. Be physically active.
• Regular exercise is powerful. It improves mood, relieves stress and makes you healthier. It can even help prevent depression.
• Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as a brisk walk) at least 5 days a week.

3. Breathe!
• When people get anxious, they sometimes hold their breath, or breathe fast and shallow.
• Practice deep breathing. Relax your belly and breathe deeply into your abdomen. Inhale and exhale s-l-o-w-l-y.
• Yoga, meditation and other relaxation techniques also relieve stress.

4. Talk about it.
• Talk with a trusted friend, family member, or religious advisor.
• Talking puts problems in perspective. Worries decrease, and solutions emerge.
• Spend more time with people who support you, and less time with people who don’t.

5. Write about it.
• Keep a “stress journal” for a week to help you identify your triggers.
• Describe what makes you tense. What happened? How did you feel?
• Look at the events that were most stressful. Pick ONE thing to work on.

6. Treat yourself well.
• When you’re overwhelmed, everything feels more difficult. It’s harder to be good to yourself. But now is the time to try.
• Eat as well as you can. Get to bed on time. Keep your medical appointments. Take your daily medicine.
• Can’t do it ALL today? Nobody’s perfect. Try again tomorrow.

7. Make time for yourself.
• Do something you enjoy every day.
• Get somebody to watch the kids for awhile. Go to the movies or take a walk in the park.
• Take short breaks at work. Take a long weekend. Take a real vacation for once.

8. Keep it simple.
• Set realistic expectations and goals. Take small, not big, steps.
• Try to change the way you see things:
  • Don’t mistake temporary problems (“I’m tired today”) for permanent ones (“I’m too old to change”).
  • Don’t mistake specific problems (“I have a bad habit”) for general ones (“I’m a bad person”).

9. Laugh it off.
• Laughter has stress-relieving benefits – and it’s FREE.
• Humor helps us see problems as “challenges” instead of “threats.” It connects us with others, and it’s contagious.
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