

Coping With Physical Discomfort from Stress

Sometimes, your emotions can trigger physical responses and urges in your body. For example, if you are nervous, you may feel your hands start to shake or sweat. Instead of focusing on getting rid of your anxiety and the physical responses that accompany it, try accepting them as they arise.

How Stress Affects the Body

Emotional stress often causes tension or discomfort in the forehead, temples, neck, throat, jaw, shoulders, chest or abdomen. Most people feel one (or a combination) of these symptoms when they are stressed, while others experience numbness. At times, attempting to ignore or push these feelings away can worsen the discomfort. Instead of thinking about sweaty palms, shaking hands, stiff shoulders, a tight throat, or a quick heart rate as weaknesses, think of them as natural responses to your feelings.

Developing Mindfulness

When you are experiencing pain or discomfort, take a minute to focus on it and ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I feel uncomfortable?
- What does it feel like?
- Does it have a certain shape?
- Does it move or stay in one place?

Breathe deeply and acknowledge your discomfort and its characteristics. Accept how you are feeling and take ten slow, deep breaths. Recognize that the emotional discomfort you are experiencing is fleeting and that your body is simply responding to stress. Imagine your discomfort expanding and contracting as you breathe.

As you go about the rest of your day, allow yourself the space to feel uncomfortable. Learning to accept your emotional discomfort as you are experiencing it will ease some of the anxiety and tension associated with the physical symptoms of stress.

It is important to remember that being uncomfortable is not a weakness. Just as laughter is a response to humor, discomfort is a stress response. Both laughter and discomfort are natural responses to emotions.

Keep in mind that it is natural for physical symptoms of stress to come and go. Knowing that feelings of discomfort are temporary responses to stress will allow you to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

Resources

This article was inspired by "The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living" by Dr. Russ Harris.

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