

## Coping with Stress in Your Life

Stress is the physical and emotional pressure, tension and strain people feel when they experience difficult and frustrating situations in their lives. Stress can be triggered by large events such as the death of a loved one, an automobile accident, problems at work or natural disasters. But seemingly small events can also create stress. Being stuck in traffic, unsolicited phone calls interrupting your dinner, your neighbor's dog barking or even waiting in a slowly moving line at the store can increase the amount of tension and anxiety we feel.

### Coping with Stress

Too much stress can become a noticeable problem in your life in a number of ways. Emotionality, feelings of panic, anxiety and helplessness are common for people under too much pressure, as are fatigue and depression. Stress can cause or contribute to the occurrence of many physical ailments, including high blood pressure, headaches, an upset stomach, ulcers, insomnia, obesity, a weakened immune system, heart disease and stroke.

There are many things people can do to reduce the amount of stress they feel and improve their overall physical and emotional health. Here are some tips you can use to eliminate tension and pressure from your life:

- **Identify the stressors, or the causes of your stress:** Some of the things that cause anxiety are obvious. Traffic congestion, an argument with a co-worker and family tragedies are all sources of pressure in our lives, but other causes might not be so obvious. A cell phone constantly ringing, running late for an appointment, hearing upsetting news on television or radio, not sleeping enough and being around negative people are all "little things" that can accumulate, creating big tension in our lives. Once you have identified the stressors, you can try to eliminate them from your life, or at least work to minimize their influence on your physical and emotional health. Turn off your cell phone for a few hours when you are not expecting urgent calls. Go to bed a half-hour earlier than you currently do. Spend more time around people who are positive and optimistic. Making little changes like these can help calm the shakiest of nerves.
- **Keep a schedule to help plan events:** Surprises and unexpected events cannot be controlled, but forgetting about an obligation or appointment you knew about beforehand can be easily avoided by keeping a calendar or day planner. Record your appointments as soon as you make them. Allow ample time for travel, and surround potentially stressful events on your schedule with free time for yourself. Try to schedule unpleasant tasks in the morning so you will not spend the entire day worrying about a meeting or activity you are not looking forward to. Seeing a potentially demanding event on your calendar will remind you to prepare and practice methods for dealing with the stress the

events might cause. For many people, going to the dentist or attending a large family gathering are worrisome events. Preparing ahead of time for these situations will allow you to anticipate and better handle any anxiety, angst or nervousness you might feel or encounter.

- **Do not take on too many obligations:** Avoid being like the airline or hotel that overbooks its flights or room capacity. It is alright to decline projects and duties that will create too much pressure within your already busy schedule. Your responsibility to yourself not to create undue strain in your life is more important than most of the obligations you could have to other people.
- **Spend time doing things you like to do:** Stress is most often brought about by the tasks and events we do not enjoy. While we cannot eliminate all of the chores, trials and hardships from life, we can counteract them by making and taking time to do activities that bring us pleasure. Spend a few with family and friends whose company you enjoy. Fishing, hiking, exercising, listening to your favorite music and even doing the crossword puzzle from the morning paper are all activities that can ease tension.
- **Perform relaxation techniques:** Many people find comfort and serenity by practicing or taking classes on different relaxation techniques. There are several physical and mental approaches popular today among people who want to create a few minutes of calm in their otherwise hectic lives. Activities like deep breathing, stretching, positive visualization, yoga and meditation all have supporters who say their stress levels are reduced when they practice their chosen discipline.
- **According to the old saying, laughter is the best medicine:** If you are looking for a way to minimize the physical and mental effects of stress, laughter could be an appropriate prescription. It has been proven that people who laugh or who have been exposed to humor have lower levels of stress-related hormones in their bodies. Emotionally, laughter can neutralize the depression, anger and fear that stress and anxiety cause.
- **Get enough sleep:** Not getting enough rest makes many people irritable and less productive during the day. Staying up too late can lead to oversleeping, causing you to begin your day behind schedule, thereby increasing tension in your life as you rush to make up for lost time. There are several things you can do to increase the likelihood of your getting a good night of rest. Try to establish a set time when you go to bed every night and wake up in the morning. Avoid eating a large meal or having drinks containing caffeine close to your bedtime. Have a comfortable place to sleep and establish a pre-bedtime routine, such as reading a book or taking a shower.
- **Keep positive about life:** The anxiety and pressure people feel grow when they encounter negative thoughts and become pessimistic. Deflect these negative views and opinions in your life. Try eliminating your own self-destructive thoughts. Be accepting of the past and optimistic about the future. Do not take yourself too seriously, and be forgiving of people who hurt you and tolerant of others who have ideas different from your own.
- **Talk with a therapist or counselor:** Sometimes problems or situations become too overwhelming for people to deal with on their own. Professional therapists and counselors can help people determine the causes of their problems and healthy and constructive methods to reduce the tension and hostility difficult circumstances create. Many people feel relieved of stress just through the act of talking with somebody about their problem. Conversations with psychological professionals or group therapy sessions can make you aware of approaches to stress management that you had not previously considered.

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