



## Manage the Stress!

Stressed out? You're not alone. We all experience some level of stress each day. While short-lived or infrequent periods of stress pose little risk, stressful situations left unresolved can be harmful, affecting your physical and psychological well-being.

The impact of stress is often felt first through warning signs such as mood and sleep disturbances, upset stomach and headache, and disturbed relationships with family and friends. Stress at chronic levels can cause further damage by wearing down biological systems, leaving your body more vulnerable to injury and disease.

In an attempt to manage stress, many people resort to negative reactions such as drug or alcohol abuse, smoking, overeating, excessive watching of television, or social withdrawal. Although these may offer a diversion from stress, they rarely reduce it. A more positive approach involves taking necessary steps to recognize, reduce, and cope with personal stresses.

### Effectively manage the stress in your life. Consider the following:

- **Determine your personal stressors:** Stress is triggered by different events and issues in our lives. Think about what stresses you the most. Is it a particular situation? Person? Perception? Once you've determined the source for stress, you can map out plans to either avoid it, change your perception of it, or learn coping mechanisms to deal with it.
- **If you can't remove the cause of your stress, then:**
  - **Start talking:** Learn to express your feelings when you're under stress. It will give you the opportunity to define your thoughts, as well as help you realize that you don't have to face your problems alone.
  - **Get moving:** Studies show that exercise reduces stress. It distracts you from the source of stress and helps eliminate excess energy. Its calming effect can lead to decreased emotional distress and better concentration. Exercise also makes you feel stronger and more capable of handling challenges.
  - **Control your diet and sleep habits:** When under stress, make a special effort to eat a balanced and nutritious diet and get a good night's sleep. You'll have more energy and better mental focus to perform and cope with stressful situations.
  - **Develop coping skills:** To cope well with stress requires that you recognize the source of stress, have a plan, and take control. Once you've recognized the source of your stress, develop a systematic and rational way of thinking it through. Break down each problem into smaller pieces to make them seem less overwhelming. You'll then be able to figure out options to better handle the situation.
  - **Widen your scope:** Volunteer your time and services - doing something for others can help you forget about your own problems and increase your self-esteem.
  - **Seek therapy:** There's nothing wrong with seeking professional help. When you're not able to handle stressful conditions alone, therapy can help you better cope and handle conflict, manage anger, or communicate with other people, and resolve some of the problems that are causing you stress.
  - **Live happily ever after:** The best advice for dealing with stress is to step back and place it in its proper place. In the grand scheme of things, how serious and important is the situation? Nobody is perfect, and everyone makes mistakes. Show everyone - including yourself - some compassion.



*Source: Adapted from All Stressed Out and Nowhere to Go Safety Tip Reminder, <http://www.nsc.org/onlinecart/product.cfm?id=1192>*

## **Stress at Work**

Stress in the workplace is a common and costly problem. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median absence from work due to occupational stress in 1997 was 23 days, more than four times the median absence for all nonfatal occupational injuries.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) suggests that at a minimum, preparation for a stress prevention program should include:

- Building general awareness about job stress (causes, costs, control)
- Securing top management commitment and support for the program
- Incorporating employee input and involvement in all phases of the program
- Establishing the technical capacity to conduct the program (e.g. specialized training for in-house staff or use of job stress consultants)

### **Some helpful resources:**

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH),  
Stress at Work web page, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress>  
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), <http://www.bls.gov>  
National Safety Council (NSC), <http://www.nsc.org>

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