

## ARE YOU STRESSED?



Stress is a natural part of life. Every day there are responsibilities, obligations and pressures that change and challenge you. In response to these daily strains your body automatically increases blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, metabolism, and blood flow to muscles. However, when this natural response is prolonged or triggered too often without sufficient adjustments to counter its effects, it can threaten your health and well being. Therefore, it is essential that you learn to cope with these natural responses in order to avoid physical and/or emotional problems.

### Did you know?

75-90 percent of visits to physicians are stress related. Job stress is a major health factor costing businesses an estimated \$150 billion annually. Stress related disorders are a major cause of rapidly increasing healthcare costs.

### Am I Suffering From Stress and Tension?

Each person handles stress differently. Some people actually seek out situations that may appear stressful to others. A major life decision, such as changing careers or buying a house, might be overwhelming for some people while others may welcome the change. Some find sitting in traffic too much to take, while others take it in stride. The key is determining your personal tolerance levels for stressful situations. Stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders that can compromise health, vitality, and peace-of-mind, all of which may affect personal and professional relationships. Too much stress can cause relatively minor illnesses like insomnia, backaches, or headaches as well as potentially life-threatening diseases like high blood pressure and heart disease.

### Can you identify negative reactions to stress and tension?

1. Do minor problems and disappointments upset you excessively?
2. Do the small pleasures of life fail to satisfy you?
3. Are you unable to stop thinking of your worries?
4. Do you feel inadequate or suffer from self-doubt?
5. Are you constantly tired?
6. Do you experience flashes of anger over situations that used to not bother you?
7. Have you noticed a change in sleeping or eating patterns?
8. Do you suffer from chronic pain, headaches, or backaches?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, consider the following suggestions.

## Reducing or Controlling Stress and Tension

- **Determine your tolerance level** for stress and try to live within these limits. Learn to accept or change stressful and tense situations whenever possible.
- **Be realistic** -- If you feel overwhelmed by some activities - learn to say no! Eliminate an activity that is not absolutely necessary or ask someone else to help. You may be taking on more responsibility than you can or should handle. If you meet resistance, give reasons why you are making the changes. Be willing to listen to other's suggestions and be ready to compromise.
- **Shed the "superman/woman" urge** -- No one is perfect, so don't expect perfection from yourself or others. Ask yourself: What really needs to be done? How much can I do? Is the deadline realistic? What adjustments can I make? Don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it.
- **Meditate** -- Just 10 to 20 minutes of quiet reflection may bring relief from chronic stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. Use the time to listen to music, relax and try to think of pleasant things or nothing at all.
- **Visualize** -- Use your imagination and picture how you can manage a stressful situation more successfully. Whether it's a business presentation or moving to a new place, many people feel visual rehearsals boost self-confidence and enable them to take a more positive approach to a difficult task.
- **Take one thing at a time** -- For people under tension or stress, an ordinary workload can sometimes seem unbearable. The best way to cope with this feeling of being overwhelmed is to take one task at a time. Pick one urgent task and work on it. Once you accomplish that task, choose the next one. The positive feeling of "checking off" work is very satisfying. It will motivate you to keep going.
- **Exercise** -- Regular exercise is a popular way to relieve stress. 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity benefits both body and mind.
- **Hobbies** -- Take a break from your worries by doing something you enjoy. Whether your interests include gardening or painting, schedule time to indulge yourself.



- **Healthy lifestyle** -- Good nutrition makes a difference. Limit intake of caffeine and alcohol get adequate rest, exercise, and balance work and play.
- **Share your feelings** -- A phone call to a friend lets you know that you are not the only one having a bad day, dealing with a sick child, or working in a busy office. Stay in touch with friends and family. Let them provide love, support, and guidance. Don't try to cope alone.
- **Give in occasionally** -- Be flexible! If you find you are meeting constant opposition in either your personal or professional life, rethink your position or strategy. Arguing only intensifies stressful feelings. If you know you are right, stand your ground, but do so calmly and rationally. Make allowances for other's opinions and be prepared to compromise. If you are willing to give in, others may meet you halfway. Not only will you reduce your stress; you may find better solutions to your problems.
- **Go easy with criticism** -- You may expect too much of yourself and others. Try not to feel frustrated, let down, disappointed, even "trapped" when another person does not measure up.



### **Where To Get Help**

Help may be as close as a friend or a spouse. But if you think that you or someone you know may be under more stress than just dealing with a passing difficulty, it may be helpful to talk with your doctor, spiritual advisor, or local Mental Health Association. They may suggest you visit with a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or other qualified counselor.