

Hope & Healing

Stress Calming Your Stress

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

We live hectic lives in America today. We push hard to manage our careers, families, relationships, and money. There are lots of headaches at our jobs. And we are pressured to buy, buy, buy. But, most of us already owe too much money. Result: We are up to our necks in stress.

Consequently mental health centers, psychiatrists' offices, and psychologists' schedules are crammed with persons anxious for relief. Usually relief is offered through tranquilizers or anti-depressants, adding to the costs of illness.

What is Stress? _____

Stress is the price our minds and bodies pay when our day-to-day problems overcome our abilities to cope with them. The pressures of modern life create daily stress that causes our bodies to run as if in constant overdrive. Our tempers become short and we flare in anger at mild irritations. We think about our problems constantly. We quit exercising and lose interest in sex. We may take up cigarette smoking, drink too much alcohol or try drugs to feel better. If the stress continues we may develop an ulcer, heart trouble or high blood pressure.

Losing Control _____

Many studies about stress were done among people who work for large corporations. But what we know about stress applies at home as well. Raising children, managing a household, worrying about money, and getting along

with each other, creates stresses similar to those we face at work. When the stress at home and the stress at work combine together, the thing that seems to count most is: "How much control do I have over the problems I face?" As long as we can keep things under control, we can usually live with our stress levels.

The Cause of Stress _____

Most of us want the same things in life: A well-paying job, a nice home, great vacations, a new car, healthy kids who will get good educations, and we want them all at the same time. In our push to get what we want, we work more than we did 20 years ago.

Too much work and long hours cause more workplace stress than any thing else. Work stress carries over to home life. Close behind the long work hours in causing stress, are the feelings of loss of control and isolation in our jobs.

It is possible to have less stress at work. Studies show that a low-stress, satisfying job will:

- Allow you to develop and increase your skills.
- Give you some control in planning.
- Offer you regular feedback from your boss.
- Give you a way to settle those things that bother you.
- Provide some communication between you and the customer about the product or service you create.

Tracking Success _____

Buy yourself a small notebook, and begin a stress diary to help identify what causes your stress. Writing things down

helps you to be more precise about them. What you will learn is that the stress that comes from the outside creates a reaction within you that sets off your emotions. It may not be the stress that causes the trouble. It may be your reaction to the stress.

Keep the record for a week: when anything like deadlines at work, traffic, or your bank account being overdrawn upset you, write down your response to the stress: headache, heart racing, stomach upset, anger at the boss, and so on.

What The Stress Diary Can Do For You _____

The stress diary will identify patterns of your stress, but the greatest value is the boost it gives as you find solutions. Here are three steps to take to begin gaining control of your life.

Step 1. Identify what is causing the stress you feel. Write out the source of your stress on paper. If there are several sources, write clear descriptions of each.

Step 2. Think about what you can do to solve the problems that caused the stress in the first place. Write down your solutions. The key here is to increase your options.

Step 3. Act. Make the best decision you can. Take these steps toward solving your problems. Moving forward will give you a sense of relief and of purpose.

In The Meantime _____

During the week that you fill out your stress diary, become familiar with five basic ways you can cope with stress daily. And, begin planning to become stress resistant by solving the underlying problems that created the stress in the first place.

Five Basic Ways to Cope With Stress _____

No single stress reduction program will work for everyone. Adapt these to your personal situation.

1. Gain control. If too many things are piling in on you, take time to sort things out. Make a list of everything that is pressing. Number them as to which is most important. Then do one or two things on the list. Next, pitch into the urgent things. Finish them one at a time. Soon the situation will come under control.

2. Learn to relax. A relaxation tape may help teach you the techniques you need. They can be bought in any music store.

3. Exercise. Take a 40 minute walk at lunch. Begin a regular exercise plan. Put it on your calendar. Regular exercise pumps endorphins, a natural tranquilizer, into the body.

4. Reduce chemical stressors. Alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine will all increase stress in the long run. Make plans to quit smoking. Limit alcohol to an occasional beer or glass of wine. Limit your caffeine from tea, coffee and cola drinks.

5. Develop your practical intelligence. Harness both your ability to reason and your common sense so that they work together.

Becoming Stress Resistant _____

Much stress is caused by two things:

1. Unclear priorities.
2. Lack of simple systems for dealing with everyday life.

Solution: Begin to develop systems that will streamline your life, from your sock drawer to your activity calendar. You will benefit by gaining control, the most important thing you can do to reduce stress. Here is a three step plan to uncomplicate your living. The first step is the hardest, but, all three are vital.

Step 1. Adjust your attitude. Believe that you can let go of bad habits and be committed to replacing them with better ones. Avoid trying to do things perfectly. Stop procrastinating.

Step 2. Prioritize and plan. Take time to identify your life missions, goals, and priorities. Keep a notebook. List your goals under one page. Organize under career, house, finances, self-improvement, family. Develop them into projects. Give each project a priority number.

Step 3. Review the role of religion in your life. Few people on their death bed wish they had spent more time at work. Those people who capture all that religion has to give, seem able to grasp life as a challenge without being overcome by the stresses.

Summary _____

Life without stresses is impossible. The key to the control of stress is to organize your life into systems so that little things don't keep cropping up to annoy you. Then you can concentrate on the large things, those that move life ahead.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Taking it Easy

Each of us will live forever, somewhere. In fact, we are in eternity now. So why rush? Perhaps we do so because we are captive of the time we live in. Even so, several basic rules can help us take it easy.

Don't worry. Will whatever concerns you now matter in 20 years? Close out each day as it ends. Breathe a prayer as you get rested from sleep.

Don't condemn. You can't know the other person's troubles. He or she may be overcoming temptations, stupidity, ignorance, or misunderstanding.

Don't resent. Forgiveness is strong medicine. Set the other person and yourself free.

Don't grumble. If you don't like what you experience, change it.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.