



Watch Out for Stress

Many people think of stress as something that comes from the outside. But, stress is actually defined as how you respond—physically and emotionally—to change and to challenging situations.

There are positive and negative aspects to stress. Stress can be experienced as the sense of excitement you feel when you get a promotion, or the feeling of tension that creeps up on you during an argument with your spouse. Some stress helps you concentrate, focus and perform. Many people do their best work when under pressure. But you run into trouble when you can't relax after meeting a challenge. When stress becomes a constant way of life, your health and well-being can suffer.



Physical Symptoms and Consequences of Stress

- ✓ insomnia
- ✓ sexual dysfunction
- ✓ indigestion
- ✓ headaches
- ✓ muscle aches
- ✓ high blood pressure
- ✓ heart attacks
- ✓ stroke
- ✓ hormonal imbalances
- ✓ compromised immune system

Behavioral Symptoms of Stress

- ✓ isolation from family and friends
- ✓ increase in smoking
- ✓ drug and alcohol abuse
- ✓ depression and anxiety
- ✓ irritability and rapid mood swings
- ✓ compulsive eating or dieting
- ✓ child or spousal abuse

Sources of Stress at Work

- ✓ lack of control caused by unclear job responsibilities or inadequate resources to do the job
- ✓ lack of recognition or feedback
- ✓ uncertainty about one's future
- ✓ boredom

Sources of Stress at Home

- ✓ child discipline problems
- ✓ relationships with family members
- ✓ balancing career and family obligations
- ✓ coping with financial problems
- ✓ illness in the family

Learning to Handle Stress

Take control.

Many people try to resist or avoid stress. But the best way to manage stress is to develop a sense of control over the important aspects of your life and your responses to challenging situations.

Learn the power of priorities.

One of the most valuable tools you have for managing stress is your ability to establish priorities in your work and family life. Your priorities are based on what's fundamentally important to your life at home and at work. Most people think of personal priorities in terms of relationships, obligations to meet their own needs and their commitments to work and family. If you feel too much stress in response to challenging situations, it may be time to review your values and priorities.

Use time as a tool.

Time management can help you manage stress. Use long-range planning, calendars and to-do lists to organize your time. Ask yourself: "Is this the best use of my time right now?"

Learn to communicate.

Express your concerns and needs to those who may be able to help, including your supervisor, Employment Assistance Program (EAP) professional or your spouse. Learn to negotiate and communicate regularly so that stressors don't build up.

Check your expectations.

Be frank about your expectations of others. Let go of unrealistic expectations of yourself. Expecting perfection from yourself or trying to live up to a role or image that's not compatible with your skills, personality or values can cause considerable stress.

Allow for change.

Remember that change is inevitable. We may work hard to establish priorities only to find that they're not flexible enough to be realistic. If you're prepared to accept changes in your plans and adapt to minor setbacks, you'll be better able to roll with the punches.