

Stress Management

What is Stress?

Stress is simply the body's response to any demand made on it. Stress is not by definition synonymous with nervous tension or anxiety. Stress provides the means to express talents and energies and pursue happiness; it can also cause exhaustion and illness, either physical or psychological; heart attacks and accidents. The important thing to remember about stress is that certain forms are normal and essential.

As the body responds to various forms of physical or psychological stress, certain predictable changes occur. These include increased heart rate, blood pressure, and secretions of stimulatory hormones. These responses to stress will occur whether the stress is positive or negative in nature. It is known as the "fight or flight" mechanism. Continual exposure lowers the body's ability to cope with additional forms of psychological or physiological stress.

Recognizing Stress

The following are indicators that you may experience:

- General irritability
- Elevated heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased accident proneness
- Floating anxiety-anxious feeling for no specific reason
- Trembling
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- pain n neck and/or lower back
- Changes in appetite or sleep pattern

Stress is a process that builds. It's more effective to intervene early in the process rather than later. Try to become aware of the signs that suggest the process has begun.

Stress Management Strategies

The following are tips on how to maintain a healthier lifestyle and to prepare you to cope with the stress of everyday living.

- Structure each day to include a minimum of 20 minutes of aerobic exercise.
- Eat well balanced meals, more whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Substitute fruits for desserts.
- Avoid caffeine. The substance may aggravate anxiety, insomnia, nervousness and trembling.
- Reduce refined sugars. Excess sugars cause frequent fluctuation in blood glucose levels, adding stress to the body's physiological functioning.
- Reduce alcohol and drugs. These substances may add to headaches and swelling, decrease coping mechanisms and add to depression.
- Get at least 7 hours of sleep nightly.
- Spend time each day with at least one relaxation technique – imagery, daydreaming, prayer, yoga or meditation.
- Take a warm bath or shower.
- Go for a walk.
- Get in touch! Hug someone, hold hands, or stroke a pet. Physical contact is a great way to relieve stress.