

How to conquer stress

Do you manage the stress in your life, or does it manage you? Have you even felt frazzled or despairing, facing situations which appeared totally overwhelming?

There is no way to predict what circumstances will arise on any given day, and the accompanying stress is just as unavoidable; it is simply the body's reaction to change.

We can't see stress directly, but we can feel it and its influence on our physical and emotional health. We can also learn to make stress work for us in ways that are positive and creative.

Stress means different things to different people. Suppose you are asleep and not consciously aware of any stress. But after an eventful day, you are still under some stress. Your heart must go on pumping, your digestive system will keep on working, even your brain goes on dreaming. Only when there is no demand on your body to change or react will there be no stress.

Any activity or situation that happens to you in your life, demanding change, may create stress. Many of these events are unanticipated, and not all stressful events are sad or depressing. Even joyous occasions, such as Christmas, weddings, a new job, or a move to a new place can cause stress.

Major Causes

EXTERNAL

- 1) uncertainty and change
 - fear of outside forces
 - too much change in too short a time
- 2) work/school environment
 - amount of work and responsibility
 - conflict with authority, others
- 3) survival issues
 - money, housing, food, clothing

INTERNAL

- 4) family situations
- 5) interpersonal conflict

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- 6) secondary stress stemming from a close relationship with someone experiencing severe stress
- 7) uncertainty about one's role, future

The internal sources of stress are often more complex than the external ones, but in either case, you have reached a point of no return and the world around you is being changes. As a result, you must change and the only sure thing you can change is yourself. You can't change the other person, and you can't always change the situation. This realization, believe it or not, is a step in growth, and allows you to use stress as a positive force rather than a negative one.

How can we recognize when we or others around us are under stress? Are there recognizable symptoms that serve as indicators? Emotional signs may include irritability, excitability, depression and sadness, an inability to concentrate, impulsive behavior, and an overpowering urge to cry, run or hide. Physical symptoms may include fatigue, change in appetite, headaches, ulcers, hay fever, weakness, dizziness or being easily startled by small sounds.

What can we do to cope more creatively with stress? Coping definitely involves adapting on a daily basis to a stressful situation, using some of these tools: balanced meals with limited intake of caffeine, salt, sugar and simple carbohydrates (found in donuts, pastries and junk food); relaxation and exercise; enough sleep; a variety of leisure time activities; and a conscious decision to manage both your time and your physical resources.

Estimate your available time realistically, and set aside specific

blocks of time for difficult or disliked tasks. If you can't manage your time efficiently, then you won't be managing your life without excess stress. Be your own boss. Say no and mean it when you know that you can't or haven't time to take on extra responsibilities.

To help you reduce conflict and stress at home, remember; take time for yourself; try to talk about the things that bother you, either with those involved or a neutral friend, set small steps to reach goals, and lastly, be prepared to forgive your family and friends for one annoying habit each month.

Taking control of your environment means taking control of your day, week, and month with realistic goals, and allowing opportunities for success and failure. When you feel you are in command of at least part of your own destiny, you will be able to put stressful situations into proper perspective. No one should try to eliminate stress; instead turn it into a positive experience for everyone, but especially yourself. Stress is the spice of life; use it creatively.

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