



the key

*Unlocking
Solutions
To Everyday
Problems*

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EAP COORDINATOR'S CORNER

One of the "Key" elements to good health is the management of stress. Similar to the old saying, "we cannot escape death or taxes" - we cannot escape stress - but we can learn how to deal with it

We need to remember the connection between our physical body and our mind. We are what we think.



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April is National Stress Awareness Month and research has linked chronic stress with life-threatening illnesses such as heart attacks, stroke, depression, and chronic pain.

Stress can also be a major contributor to bad habits and excessive drinking, smoking, and drug abuse.

Most of us have felt "stressed out" at one time or another. When this feeling persists day after day, stress becomes chronic. Chronic stress can take a toll on our careers, on our quality of life, and on our bodies making us susceptible to a host of illnesses. In fact, what many of us do not realize (and what medical researchers are confirming in study after study) is that our stress levels are directly linked to our physical well being. Seventy-five percent of our visits to the doctor's office often concern stress-related ailments.

Stress has implications for many other ailments as well. Depression and anxiety, which afflict millions of Americans, can be caused or exacerbated by stress. It also triggers flare-ups of asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, and gastrointestinal problems. And illness is just the tip of the iceberg. Stress affects you emotionally as well, by interfering with the joy you draw from life and loved ones.

We all know that stress affects us at work. In fact, one in four people say they have missed work due to work-related stress. When we are under chronic stress, we often have trouble meeting deadlines, concentrating, and making decisions. Our productivity and performance decrease as our stress levels increase. We also may become easily irritated and overwhelmed, and have relationship problems with colleagues. Many people who are over-stressed at work are unable to leave their job-related issues behind at night - or they feel immobilized on the job. Stress can also mean more headaches, backaches, and colds...and more sick days.

The good news is that we now know that caring for our minds as well as our bodies can keep us healthier, happier, and more productive in all aspects of life. Below are some strategies you can use to better manage stress. These tips may seem like common sense, but few of us apply them to our daily lives. They will help if you use them.



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Stress Management Strategies

- ✓ Treat your body right - eating right and exercising can increase your tolerance to stress.
- ✓ Set realistic goals - do what is possible and carry on.
- ✓ Set and re-set your priorities - eliminate unessential tasks.
- ✓ Take one task at a time - and make "to do" lists.
- ✓ Take five - a short break can help slow down your mind to improve your ability to deal with stress later.
- ✓ Learn to relax or meditate - studies show that just 10 to 20 minutes of quiet reflection or meditation a day can bring relief from stress and increase your tolerance to it.
- ✓ Give yourself a break - no one is perfect.
- ✓ Learn to say "no" - slow down and be honest about what you can comfortably do.
- ✓ Be flexible - make allowances for other people's opinions and be prepared to compromise.
- ✓ Avoid excessive competition - this can be dangerous emotionally and physically.
- ✓ Go easy on criticism - try not to feel let down or frustrated when your expectations are not met.
- ✓ Manage your anger - allow time to cool down. You will be better equipped to handle the problem constructively later.
- ✓ Be honest with colleagues - do not just complain, make practical suggestions for improvement.
- ✓ Talk it out with a loved one - talking it out can help you see things more clearly, release negative feelings, and get emotional support.

Signs of Stress

If you experience some or all of these signs of stress, and they persist, it may be time to seek help.

- Constantly overwhelmed
- Strained relationships
- Poor work performance
- Overly emotional
- "Little things" set you off frequently
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Headaches and backaches
- Rise in blood pressure

Mini Relaxation Techniques

Mini-relaxations can help alleviate fear and reduce pain while you sit in the dentist's chair or lie on an examining table. They are equally helpful in thwarting stress before an important meeting, while stuck in traffic, or when faced with people or situations that annoy you. **Here are a few quick relaxation techniques to try:**

When you have 1 minute:

Place your hand just beneath your navel so you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Breathe in slowly. Pause for a count of three. Breathe out...pause for a count of three. Continue to breathe deeply for one minute, pausing for a count of three after each inhalation and exhalation. Alternatively, while sitting comfortable, take a few slow deep breaths and quietly repeat to yourself "I am" as you breathe in and "at peace" as you breathe out. Repeat slowly two or three times. Then feel your entire body relax into the support of the chair.

When you have 2 minutes:

Count down slowly from 10 to zero. With each number, take one complete breath, inhaling and exhaling. For example, breathe in deeply saying "10" to yourself. Breathe out slowly. On your next breath, say "nine," and so on. If you feel lightheaded, count down more slowly to space your breaths further apart. When you reach zero, you should feel more relaxed. If not, go through the exercise again.

When you have 3 minutes:

While sitting down, take a break from whatever you are doing and check your body for tension. Relax your facial muscles and allow your jaw to fall open slightly. Let your shoulders drop. Let your arms fall to your sides. Allow your hands to loosen so that there are spaces between your fingers. Uncross your legs and ankles. Feel your thighs sink into your chair, letting your legs fall comfortably apart. Feel your shins and calves become heavier and your feet grow roots into the floor. Now breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly. Each time you breathe out, try to relax even more.

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness—taking care of yourself is a sign of strength.

Do not be afraid to seek professional assistance.

Sources:

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