



Stress Management

Everywhere we go today, we hear people saying they are “stressed out”. We have all experienced many types of stress in our daily lives, both professionally and personally. In spite of this, we still need to perform our duties and responsibilities in the best way possible. In order to do this, it would be helpful to learn how to manage our own stress and know stress producing situations that may exist, as well as assist in improving these situations.

■ What is Stress?

Stress is a response to change or conflict. It is the way we react physically, mentally, and emotionally to the various conditions, changes, and demands of life. Stress can be either positive or negative. Positive stressors can include marriage, birth of a child, or a promotion on a job. As a positive stimulus, it can bring about new awareness and a new perspective. Negative stressors may consist of divorce, death of a family member, losing a job, or conflict with a family member. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of anger, denial, depression, and distrust which can lead to health problems. Whether the stress is due to the death of a loved one, birth of a child, job promotion or marriage, we experience stress as we make changes in our lives. In adapting to different circumstances, stress can help or discourage us depending on how we respond to it. Stress is inevitable and is a significant part of life. We need stress, but not too much for too long. Job stress is very common for many people.

■ Seven Categories of Job Stress

- *CONTROL* – Employees who have a great deal of responsibility but little control of decision making power in their jobs have an increased risk of cardio-vascular disease, as well as other stress related illnesses.
- *COMPETENCE* – Job insecurity can be a major source of stress for many employees. Are you apprehensive about your ability to perform well? Are you challenged enough, but not too much? Do you feel secure in your job?
- *CLARITY* – Employees are not clear about their duties and responsibilities, or what the department’s or organization’s goals are can lead to stress.
- *COMMUNICATION* – Tension in the workplace often results in poor communication and can result in job stress. The ability to express your concerns, frustrations, or other emotions can also lead to stress.
- *SUPPORT* – Not being supported by your coworkers can make it more difficult

to solve additional problems at work that may be causing you stress.

- *SIGNIFICANCE* – If you view your job as meaningless or fail to take pride in it, you can find your job stressful.
- *INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY* – Taking on added responsibilities in your job can be stressful.

It is imperative that you recognize symptoms of stress. This is necessary when trying to manage it.

■ Recognizing Symptoms of Stress

- *PHYSICAL STRESS SYMPTOMS* include tension, headaches, backaches, neck aches, palpitations, irregular breathing, muscle twitches, dry mouth, cold hands and feet, dizziness, exhaustion, indigestion, nausea, fainting, excessive sweating, skin rashes, shakiness and increased need to urinate
- *MENTAL STRESS SYMPTOMS* consist of lack of concentration, forgetfulness, inability to remember recent events, inability to take in new information, lack of coordination, indecisiveness, irrational or rash decision-making, being disorganized, making mistakes more frequently, inaccuracy, struggling with simple tasks, less sensitive, persistent negative thoughts, and misjudging people and situations.
- *EMOTIONAL STRESS SYMPTOMS* include anxiety, phobias, panic attacks, aggression, guilt, depression, mood swings, tearfulness, nightmares, feeling abandoned, feeling tense, excessive worrying, loss of sense of humor, no enthusiasm, withdrawal and cynicism.
- *BEHAVIORAL STRESS SYMPTOMS* consist of increased drinking, increased smoking, loss of appetite or overeating, neglecting personal appearance, driving aggressively, withdrawing from supportive relationships, poor time management, voice tremor, too busy to relax, nail-biting, hair pulling, skin picking, having obsessive thoughts and ideas, and compulsive actions.

■ Stress Management

Many stresses can be changed, eliminated, or minimized. Here are some things you can do to manage or reduce stress:

1. Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions.
2. Develop an exercise routine (aerobic exercise, yoga, or other type exercise).
3. Practice relaxation techniques, deep breathing, meditation or muscle relaxation, when you feel tense.
4. Good nutrition, eat a balanced diet.
5. Get an adequate amount of rest each night.
6. Reduce your caffeine intake.

7. Don't say yes when you mean no.
8. Initiate a time management schedule.
9. Recognize what you can change.
10. Be flexible and adapt to change.
11. Talk it out with co-workers.
12. Learn to moderate your physical reactions to stress.
13. Develop a support network to rely on when you need it.
14. Avoid unnecessary competition.
15. Recognize and accept your limits.
16. View problems as opportunities.
17. Delegate tasks.
18. Set priorities and realistic goals.
19. Listen to music.
20. Seek help from a professional.

And always remember, as one of the leading experts in stress management tells us,

"Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one."

Hans Selye

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