

# HEALTH AND WELLNESS MINISTRY

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

### WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand or challenge.

In short bursts, stress can be positive such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline. When working correctly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. However, beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing significant damage to your health, mood, productivity, relationships, and overall quality of life.

STRESS INCREASES THE RISK OF CONDITIONS SUCH AS OBESITY, HEART DISEASE, DIABETES, DEPRESSION, GASTROINTESTINAL PROBLEMS AND ASTHMA.

Your body reacts to stress by releasing hormones. These hormones make your brain more alert, cause your muscles to tense, and increase your pulse. In the short term, these reactions are useful because they can help you handle the saturation causing stress. This is your body's way of protecting itself.

When you have chronic stress, your body stays alert, even though there is no danger. Over time, this puts you at risk for health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, depression, gastrointestinal problems, and asthma.

### THE EFFECTS OF STRESS

Your nervous system isn't very good at distinguishing between emotional and physical threats. For example, if you're super stressed over an argument with a friend, a work deadline, or a mountain of bills, your body can react just as strongly if you're facing an actual life-or-death situation. And the more your emergency stress system is

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The next time you feel stressed, here are four stress relief tips you can try:

- ❖ **Breathe deeply.** Just a few minutes of deep breathing can calm you.
- ❖ **Smile and laugh.** Our brains are interconnected with our emotions and facial expressions. When people are stressed, they often hold a lot of stress in their face. So laughs or smiles can help relieve some of that tension to improve the situation.
- ❖ **Take a break from the stressor.** When you give yourself permission to step away from what is causing you stress, you give yourself time to do something else which can help you gain a new perspective.
- ❖ **Keep your problems in perspective.** The next time you're feeling stressed out, think about the things for which you're grateful.

activated, the easier it becomes to trigger, making it harder to shut off.

## **SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF STRESS OVERLOAD**

The most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar, even normal. You don't notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll. That's why it is essential to be aware of the common warning signs and symptoms of stress overload:

- Cognitive symptoms
  - Memory problems
  - Inability to concentrate
  - Poor judgment
  - Seeing only the negative
  - Anxious or racing thoughts
  - Constant worrying
- Emotional Symptoms
  - Depression or general unhappiness
  - Anxiety and agitation
  - Moodiness, irritability or anger
  - Feeling overwhelmed
  - Loneliness or isolation
  - Other mental or emotional health problems
- Physical Symptoms
  - Aches and pains
  - Diarrhea or constipation
  - Nausea, dizziness
  - Chest pain, rapid heart rate
  - Loss of sex drive
  - Frequent colds or flu
- Behavioral Symptoms
  - Eating more or less
  - Sleeping too much or too little
  - Withdrawing from others
  - Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
  - Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
  - Nervous habits (nail biting, pacing)

## **CAUSES OF STRESS**

The situations and pressures that cause stress are known as stressors. We usually think of stressors as being negative, such as an exhausting work schedule or a rocky relationship. However, anything that puts high demands on you can be stressful. This includes positive events, such as getting married, buying a house, going to college, receiving a promotion.

Of course, not all stress is caused by external factors. Stress can also be internal or self-generated when you worry excessively about something that may or may not happen or have irrational, pessimistic thoughts about life.

What causes stress depends, at least in part, on your perception of it. Something stressful to you may not faze someone else; they may even enjoy it. While some of us are terrified of getting in front of people to perform or speak, others may live for the spotlight. Where one person thrives under pressure and performs best in the face of a tight deadline, another will shut down when work demands escalate.

**Top 10 Stressful Life Events:** According to the widely validated Holms and Rahe Stress Scale, these are the top ten stressful life events for adults that can contribute to illness:

1. Death of a spouse
2. Divorce
3. Marriage separation
4. Imprisonment
5. Death of a close family member
6. Injury or illness
7. Marriage
8. Job loss
9. Marriage reconciliation
10. Retirement

## **HOW MUCH STRESS IS TOO MUCH?**

Because of the widespread damage stress can cause, it's essential to know your own limit. But just how much stress is too much differs from person to person. Some people seem to be able to roll with life's punches while others tend to crumble in the face of small obstacles or frustrations. Some people even thrive off the excitement of a high-stress lifestyle.

**Factors that influence your stress tolerance level include:**

**Your support network.** A strong network of supportive friends and family members is an enormous buffer against stress. When you have people you can count on, life's pressures don't seem as overwhelming. On the flip side, the lonelier and more isolated you are, the higher your risk of succumbing to stress.

**Your sense of control.** If you have confidence in yourself and your ability to influence events and persevere through challenges, it's easier to take stress in stride. On the other hand, if you believe that you have little control over your life—that you're at the mercy of your circumstance—stress is more likely to throw you off course.

**Your attitude and outlook.** The way you look at life, and its inevitable challenges makes a huge difference in your ability to handle stress. If you're generally hopeful and optimistic, you'll be less vulnerable. Stress-hardy people tend to embrace challenges, have a stronger sense of humor, believe in a higher purpose, and accept change as an inevitable part of life.

**Your ability to deal with your emotions.** If you don't know how to calm and soothe yourself when you're feeling sad, angry, or troubled, you're more likely to become stressed and agitated. Having the ability to identify and deal appropriately with your emotions can increase your tolerance to stress and help you bounce back from adversity.

**Your knowledge and preparation.** The more you know about a stressful situation, including how long it will last and what to expect, the easier it is to cope.

## IMPROVING YOUR ABILITY TO HANDLE STRESS

**Get moving.** Upping your activity level is one tactic you can employ right now to help relieve stress and start to feel better. Regular exercise can lift your mood and serve as a distraction from worries allowing you to break out of the cycle of negative thoughts that feed stress.

**Connect to others.** The simple act of talking face-to-face with another person can trigger hormones that relieve stress when you're feeling agitated or insecure. Even just a brief exchange of kind words or a friendly look from another human being can help calm and soothe your nervous system.

**Engage your senses.** Another fast way to relieve stress is by engaging one or more of your senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, or movement. The key is to find the sensory input that works for you. Listening to an

uplifting song or smelling ground coffee, or petting an animal. Everyone responds to sensory input differently, so experience and find what works best for you.

**Learn to relax.** Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the polar opposite of the stress response. When practiced regularly, these activities can reduce your everyday stress levels and boost feelings of joy and serenity. They also increase your ability to stay calm and collected under pressure.

**Eat a healthy diet.** The food you eat can improve or worsen your mood and affect your ability to cope with life's stressors. Eating a diet full of processed and convenience food, refined carbs, and sugary snacks can worsen symptoms of stress, while a diet rich in fresh fruits and veggies, high-quality protein and omega-3 fatty acids can help you better cope with life's ups and downs.

**Get your rest.** Feeling tired can increase stress by causing you to think irrationally. At the same time, chronic stress can disrupt your sleep. Whether you're having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night, there are plenty of ways to improve your sleep, so you feel less stressed and more productive and emotionally balanced.

## BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES RELATED TO STRESS

While the bible doesn't talk specifically about stress, it says plenty about anxiety and worry. Our stress, anxiety, and worry don't come from God. Instead, scripture reminds us to hand over our anxieties to God.

### Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

### Matthew 6:34

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

### Proverbs 3: 5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

**Matthew 11:28-30**

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

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