Stress Management

1. WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress arises when there is an imbalance between the demands present in our lives and the resources available to cope with these demands. Our increasingly dynamic lifestyles mean that our lives are constantly undergoing changes. While imbalance may occur through such changes, it is our reactions to these changes and events that determine when we feel stressed.

How do I begin to manage stress?

FIND THE SOURCE OF ANY PROBLEMS.

The first step to effective stress management is to identify the changes and imbalances that are causing you to react. In addition, however, it is also important to note you may be causing your own stress through personal expectations, feelings and thoughts.

Some of the most common areas that may cause stress include:

1. Time constraints/delays
2. Character clashes with others
3. Money problems
4. Sudden/unexpected changes
5. Excessive responsibilities
6. Special problems

2. REACTIONS TO STRESS

Reactions to stress depend greatly on the individual with symptoms manifesting themselves both physically and mentally. The most common reactions to stress include:

1. Eating too much
2. Drinking too much
3. Inability to sleep
4. Smocking

In the most extreme cases, people who maintain high levels of stress are at greater risk from heart disease, high blood pressure and often suffer from chronic hostility and cynicism. However, the more common symptoms resulting from stress are as follows:

1. Upset stomach
2. Tight neck muscles
3. Irritability
4. Headaches

LOWER YOUR TENSION LEVELS

Although negative reactions to stressful situations may be difficult to avoid at times, it is worth taking the time to analyze your negative reactions and consider how these might be changed to more positive reactions. For example:

Negative Reactions

Worrying/flushing
Overeating
Blaming others
Feeling helpless
Insulting/judgmental remarks
Eating too much

Positive Reactions

Organizing/prioritizing
Budgeting
Accepting responsibility
Asking for help
Taking it over
Exercising/physical activity

3. THINK ABOUT IT

Coping with stress means coming to grips with the fact that some situations are beyond our control. As well as altering your reactions to stress you must also equip yourself with the following skills for coping with stress:

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Acceptance
2. Self-talk
3. Positive self-talk
4. Negative self-talk

THOUGHTS such as “I can’t do this” or “I’ve failed at my job” may cause stress.

4. THINK POSITIVELY

TAKE ACTION

Don’t let stress control you. Take positive action which will reduce your levels of stress.

SELF TALK

“Self talk” is when we express our expectations and thoughts on a situation and its potential outcome as we see it. This can be both helpful and detrimental to our levels of stress as there can be positive and negative ways in which we might perceive the outcome of a situation.

Positive self-talk

Thinking of positive ways to slow a situation can provide an effective weapon against stress. “I’m in control”. I can deal with this” are examples of positive self talk.

Negative self-talk

Thoughts such as “I can’t do this” or “I’ve failed at my job” are negative and produce stress.

5. TIME MANAGEMENT

Organisation and forward planning is central to managing your time effectively.

1. Make an achievable “to-do” list and prioritise tasks
2. Remember that sometimes it is not possible to get everything done in one day. There is always tomorrow
3. Get yourself a personal organiser and make sure you utilise it
4. Delegate as much as you can
5. Handle each document only once
6. Prepare agendas for meetings and keep them present on track

6. BALANCE WORK & FAMILY

Sometimes the pressures of balancing a career and a family can be overwhelming. Gain control by using the following suggestions.

KEEPING BALANCE AT WORK

1. Work to a strict timetable and stick to limits you have set
2. Learn to say no without feeling guilty
3. Practice by making two positive statements followed by one negative, followed again by one positive statement
4. Be brief. The longer you talk the more likely you are to give in

KEEPING BALANCE AT HOME

1. Cook in large quantities and freeze individual meals
2. Set up daily and weekly routines for chores and share them with other family members
3. Schedule quality time with family members
4. Prepare for unexpected events

7. COMMUNICATION

Communication is all important if you are to work effectively with others and if you are to get the understanding of your work colleagues and family members.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Outgoing communication

1. Organise your communication method
2. Keep the message clear and concise
3. Listen to the entire message. Understand not only the content but also feelings and meaning
4. Express to understand the message through summarising what you have heard

Incoming communication

1. Establish and maintain eye contact
2. Listen to the entire message. Understand not only the content but also feelings and meaning
3. Ensure you have understood the message through summarising what you have heard

8. BREAKING THE CYCLE

TAKING TIME OUT IS IMPORTANT

1. Get away from it all. Read a book, listen to music, read a meaningful quotation
2. Laugh. You deserve it. Share jokes
3. If you feel tense, close your eyes, breath deeply, or go for a walk

EXERCISE

1. Remember that exercise can reduce tension, leaving the body better equipped to handle stress
2. Pick a form of exercise you like. Do it for 20-30 minutes, 3-4 times per week
3. Stretch breaks can relieve tension
4. Going for a walk is a simple form of exercise