



MANAGING STRESS

Stress is an inevitable part of our daily lives. It is the body's physical and emotional response to any demand placed on it, positive or negative. Some level of stress is needed to activate constructive and creative process. The rush of adrenaline produced by stress helps you to concentrate, focus, and perform at peak efficiency. Most stressors are of brief duration, allowing the body to recover and adapt to the physiological strain of the stress response i.e., increased heart rate and blood pressure, muscle tension, altered breathing. Distress and exhaustion occur when stress continues without let-up; the body becomes unable to keep up with the demands placed on it. It is this type of "negative" stress which leads to high blood pressure, heart problems, migraines, and ulcers.

Individual capacities to tolerate stress vary, and what is stressful to one person may not be stressful to others. In managing stress, an important first step is to be aware of your personal stressors, what pushes your buttons and triggers a stress response. Do you find your heart racing and palms sweating whenever you have a conference with your boss? Do you get a headache when you think about your monthly bills? Do you spend sleepless nights worrying about your kids or get knots in your stomach after yet another fight with your spouse?

Once you have identified your personal stressors, there are many approaches to controlling stress that can apply. Systematic relaxation and exercise are effective stress relievers. Relaxation techniques focus on relaxing individual parts of the body progressively and can include images. Vigorous physical exercise such as jogging, tennis, aerobics, and swimming demand active mental and physical attention and interrupts stress reactions. Other stress reducers include:

1. Improving your external environment by developing better relationships with those around you, building a support network of people you can confide in and be yourself with, and creating a home and work setting that is both functional and comfortable.
2. Improving your internal environment by developing a positive attitude toward life, seeking the positive in even bad experiences, learning to take it easy and give yourself a break when you need it, and giving yourself permission to be less than perfect.
3. Avoiding unnecessary hassles by planning and prioritizing use of time and trying not to make too many major changes at once. Some people feel they can find relief from stress through alcohol and drugs. Reliance on substances can only complicate and add to life's problems.

There are times when we are so overloaded with stress that the suggested stress-reduction techniques are not enough. This is when seeking help from a professional is necessary for health and well-being.

Family Service Counseling and Community Resource Center is only a call away. Fees are based upon an adjusted scale according to income and family size.