

How to Cope with Stress

By Dr. George Rubin

- You feel anxious, tense and irritable. Small problems upset you and you feel overwhelmed by all the things you have to do.
- You cannot think as clearly as usual. You are easily confused, forgetful and accident-prone.
- You feel generally run down and tired. You do not have your usual energy.
- You never really relax because you keep thinking about all the things you have to do. Sometimes you do not sleep very well.
- You do not find much in life to feel joyful about. There is nothing to look forward to.

These are some of the signs of a common problem called stress. We all suffer feelings of stress sometimes - the anxiety and the feeling that life is hard to cope with. Sometimes the symptoms of stress are expressed in a physical way - headaches, stomach aches, a pounding heart, a churning feeling in the stomach. Stress happens for lots of reasons. A crisis can make us feel stressed, but so can everyday problems like worries about work or money or about relationships or about children's behaviour.

Although a certain amount of stress is normal, too much can contribute to health problems, including heart disease, some types of mental illness and abuse of alcohol or drugs. That is why everyone needs to be aware of stress and know how to find good ways of coping with it.

Different things work for different people, but here are some ideas for finding ways that suit you:

- Sometimes stress is not caused so much by an event but by our attitude towards it. People who see difficult situations as challenges to overcome, rather than problems that get them down, usually cope better with stress.
- Do not make small problems seem bigger than they are. When something goes wrong, ask yourself: "In ten years' time, will this matter?"
- Try to avoid stressful situations by better planning. Give yourself more time to do things so you are not always rushing around. Try to avoid people or activities you find annoying.

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- Find time to relax each day. If you think you have not got time, remember that you will do tasks more quickly and efficiently if you feel rested and less stressed. Ways to relax include: spending time alone in a quiet place, focusing on something pleasant - soothing music, a book or magazine, a pet - or even having a long bath. Do not feel guilty about taking time for yourself.
- Go for regular walks or do some other form of exercise you enjoy, such as Tai Chi. Exercise is a great stress-reducer.
- Eat healthy food. When you feel stressed it can be easy to skip meals and fill up with fatty snack foods, sweets and take-out foods. A diet that includes plenty of bread, rice, pasta and other grains, vegetables and fruit will help you cope better.
- Do not dwell on problems or failures you have had in the past, or worry about bad things that may happen in the future. Concentrate on living in the present.
- Talk to someone. Talking about problems can sometimes help solve them or at least make you feel better about them. Sometimes other people can give you new ways of looking at problems or of dealing with them.
- Contact your local community health centre and ask if they know of any relaxation courses or relaxation tapes available in your language.
- Get expert help if nothing you do seems to help. People who can help you include counsellors or social workers.

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