

MANAGING STRESS EFFECTIVELY

It is important that we monitor our mental and physical wellbeing to maintain optimal health – just as farmers need to maintain machinery and livestock to get the best out of them.

Unmanaged stress can contribute to the “fight or flight” response which triggers stress hormones to raise our blood pressure, blood sugar and depress our immune function. It can impact on our mood, sleep and contribute to poor communication and relationship breakdown. Many of us use unhelpful stress management techniques such as drinking too much alcohol, smoking, overeating, overworking in order to try to distract ourselves from our stress. This often ends up compounding problems and leading to chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

So what are effective stress management techniques?

Realising that you have control of some things is an important step in managing stress.

1. **Identify the sources of stress in your life.** Accept your role in creating and maintaining it. eg Do you blame others for the way you feel ?
2. **Avoid unnecessary stress.** Not all stress can be avoided, and it’s not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate. Eg Practice saying “no” to avoid taking on too much.
3. **Alter the response** you have to the stress. If you can’t avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn’t present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.
4. **Adapt to the stress.** If you can’t change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.
5. **Accept the things you can’t change.** Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can’t prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it’s easier than railing against a situation you can’t change.
6. **Make time for fun and relaxation.** Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you’ll be in a better place to handle life’s stressors.
7. **Adopt a healthy lifestyle.** Exercise releases endorphins and helps you to relax and sleep. Avoid stimulants and depressants such as alcohol and caffeine which interfere with this.

Acknowledgements to Helpguide.org

For further information regarding managing stress effectively, see:

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm

For further information about relaxation techniques, see:

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm