



Stress

Stress is what you feel when you react to pressure. Pressure can come from things like work, family, money, illness, or from an internal need such as wanting to achieve a goal, wanting to fit in, or the way you feel about yourself. Everyone handles stress differently.

Stress can come from all aspects of life such as family, money, work, health, life's disappointments, isolation or too much social pressure. We can feel stress when we find ourselves on social media for too many hours thinking about how our lives don't measure up to others. Creating unrealistic comparisons about what our lives "should" look like and be like. Perhaps there are real pressures in your life about money, work and how you are going to support yourself day to day. Realize that these things are not to be dismissed and are real concerns. But how we choose to respond to these stressors and the changes we can make in our daily stress responses can make all the difference in our lives and our bodies.

The Stress Response

The Stress Response floods your body with chemicals made to prepare you for “fight or flight”. This helps you react quickly under pressure, gets you ready to meet challenges, and it is helpful in true emergencies. The Stress Response is a normal reaction, but it can be harmful if it goes on too long.

After the pressure or emergency situation has passed the Stress Response is supposed to turn off so your body can rest. If your body is constantly in “fight of flight” mode it can wear your body down. If this continues for a long time it can have negative affects on your physical health and wellbeing.

Signs Your Stress Response is Overworking

Change in Feelings:

Feeling sad, edgy, irritable, anxious, or panicked, much of the time
Blaming other people for bad things that happen to you.

Symptoms of Depression:

Only seeing the down side of situations
Feeling like things that you used to enjoy aren't fun now

Physical Ailments:

Dry mouth or skin problems
Loss of appetite or need to eat constantly
Headaches, stomachaches, diarrhea or constipation
Trouble sleeping

How Stress Harms Your Health

Stress can contribute to the following conditions:

- Anxiety Disorder
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Hair loss
- Heart disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Sexual Dysfunction
- Tooth and gum disease
- Ulcers
- Weight gain or loss

How to Lower Your Stress Level

Give Yourself Time

Leave room in your life for the things you like to do, for things that make you laugh, and for moments with friends and family. Learn to say no to things you don't really need or want to be doing.

Get Some Help

You know that running list you keep in your head? Put it down on paper. Then cross out what isn't needed right now, circling only the things that need to be done today. Then look at areas where someone else may be able to help and perhaps you give yourself permission to put something on the back burner that you really can't get to right now. Prioritize. Get help. Let it go. Ask for help. Repeat.

And if you need to, talk to a professional (doctor, therapist) for some stress reduction techniques.

Have Healthy Habits

Move your body. Nourish your body. Sleep

Relax

Take time to unwind and calm down everyday. Try going for walks, reading, doing something you find fun. Or maybe take advantage of the Relaxation Response Practice below.

Starting a Relaxation Response Practice

The Relaxation Response is a state of rest that is the opposite of the Stress Response. The Relaxation Response tells your body to stop the fight, flight or freeze mode.

Set aside 10 to 20 minutes once or twice each day to practice a Relaxation Method.

Pick one of the following methods to use. You may need to try a few to see which one you like the best, or you can alternate them. Each can help you create a relaxed state of being:

- Guided or Visual Imagery
- Mindfulness Meditation
- Move your body through exercise, dance, yoga, stretching.

Ask your health care provider for more resources if you need them. (look at the mindful meditation and guided imagery handouts here on the site as they have a lot of good information on how to develop a personal practice)