

Managing Stress and Life Events

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PSY8636

Handling stress effectively requires that you take charge of those situations that put stress on you. This means taking positive steps to strengthen your ability to manage difficult situations. Think of stress as coming both from your bodily functions and factors in your environment, such as people, jobs, etc. Any physical or emotional disorder can generate marked changes in your mood, cognition, and behavior. These changes can result in increased stress. Here are some ways to manage your stress:

1. **Monitor the subtle changes within yourself.** This includes your ovarian-related cycles and emotional and cognitive fluctuations.
2. **Observe your patterns of responding.** Note carefully how you usually react, emotionally or behaviorally, when a stressful event in general or a particular stressor occurs.
3. **Learn how to increase your sensitivity to the factors that can lead to burnout.** Develop a program to ensure that your self-concept remains positive, that you get rid of self-defeating habits, keeping quality in your close relationships, and challenge the stress that often is present in work situations.
4. **Move from inactive or reactive to *proactive* or assertive.** Taking charge of managing your stress and avoiding burnout requires that you take positive steps, not waiting for situations to improve on their own. You may choose to attend an assertiveness training seminar to develop these skills.
5. **Learn how to relax through breathing and visualization techniques.** Tension is increased when we stop breathing or breathe shallowly in stressful situations. You can learn more relaxing responses through simply telling yourself to remember to breathe deeply before reacting. You can also “rehearse” your responses to stress beforehand, developing a clear image of yourself performing effectively. You may also learn to bring into your consciousness an image of a safe place and let that image calm you while facing difficult situations.
6. **Look into other sources of relief.** Exercise often reduces stress. Confiding in your friends may “take the load off.” Bubble baths, time alone, engaging in favorite activities, spending time in an imitate relationship, distracting yourself with work tasks, engaging in sports, watching television or movies—use your imagination.

7. **Consider professional help.** You may benefit from talking with a therapist if your responses to internal and external stressors exceed your capacity to cope effectively. You might also consider alternative treatments, such as massage, and acupuncture.

*J.E. Jones & W.L. Bearley. (1996). *Managing your energy*. Amherst. MA: HRD Press.

Lori A. Futterman RN, Ph.D. is experienced in partnering with physicians, to offer patients optimal care by integrating both medical and psychological care.

To explore how we may partner in the best interest of our patients, please call:

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