

Stress **Making It A Positive Force In Your Life**

Imagine your life without stress. As ideal as it sounds, a stress-free life would be a life without change and boring indeed. One way of defining stress is simply as any change to which we have to adapt. If you have been juggling the complexities of working in or running a business, maintaining important relationships and trying to have some leisure time enjoyment, you are very familiar with the tug of war that stress plays in our daily routines.

When the adjustments inherent in our daily lives become too frustrating or prolonged, the harmful effects of stress can occur. We may become less efficient on our jobs, less tolerant of others and even experience physical consequences such as headaches, high blood pressure or sleep disturbance. These physical changes are red flags, a signal that we are pushing our bodies too far. They are not meant to be ignored.

Because stress cannot be eliminated from our lives, it is useful to be aware of ways that we can use stress positively or reduce some of its negative impact. Here are some suggestions to begin the process.

You may want to start by making a personal appraisal of your stress level. Major life changes such as a move, job change or divorce are by nature stressful and can make it harder to cope with smaller stresses. Daily hassles, like the inconsiderate driver, the forgotten wallet, and the surprise work deadline, are stressors which can and do add up. The result often is a sense of limited control over our time, our relationships and our personal priorities.

As you consider your current lifestyle, note the physical and emotional reactions that are part of your personal response to stress as well as some of the tools that you have used to weather the storms of stress in the past. You probably already have many useful techniques at your disposal but here are some ideas that I have found personally helpful and which I recommend to those wanting to improve their stress coping skills.

Physical Activity: While regular exercise helps to reduce the negative effects of stress, a short walk during a harried day offers immense benefits as well. Removing yourself from a stressful environment allows you to regroup both emotionally and mentally.

Prioritize: Write down and review what is most important each day. Check off and congratulate yourself on your accomplishments rather than berating yourself for what you were not able to do.

Be Good to Yourself: Get appropriate sleep and nutrition. Nurture yourself through your relationships with others and through your spiritual life. Laughter and fun are great stress relievers. Allow yourself to share your stress with others.

Would You Rather Be Happy Or Right? Recognize that you can't handle every situation perfectly and may not have all of the answers. Heated disagreements with others can raise our stress levels and accomplish little. Look for compromises, take a time-out from confrontations and recognize that things eventually do work out.

At times, the assistance of a mental health professional is useful when the changes in our lives are too overwhelming. However, a few simple changes can often turn stress into a more positive force in our lives.