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Stress management

Definition:

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension.

See also: [Stress in childhood](#)

Information:

Emotional stress usually occurs when people consider situations difficult or unable to manage. Different people consider different situations as stressful.

Physical stress refers to a physical reaction of the body to various triggers. The pain experienced after surgery is an example of physical stress. Physical stress often leads to emotional stress, and emotional stress often occurs as physical discomfort (e.g., stomach cramps).

Stress management involves controlling and reducing the tension that occurs in stressful situations by making emotional and physical changes. The degree of stress and the desire to make the changes will determine how much change takes place.

ASSESSING STRESS

Attitude: A person's attitude can influence whether or not a situation or emotion is stressful. A person with a negative attitude will often report more stress than would someone with a positive attitude.

Physical well-being: A poor diet puts the body in a state of physical stress and weakens the immune system. As a result, the person can be more likely to get infections. A poor diet can mean unhealthy food choices, not eating enough, or not eating on a normal schedule. This can cause a person to not get enough nutrients.

This form of physical stress also decreases the ability to deal with emotional stress, because not getting the right nutrition may affect the way the brain processes information.

Physical activity: Not getting enough physical activity can put the body in a stressful state. Physical activity has many benefits. A regular physical activity program can help decrease [depression](#), if it exists. It also improves the feeling of well-being.

Support systems: Most everyone needs someone in their life they can rely on when they are having a hard time. Having little or no support makes stressful situations even more difficult to deal with.

Relaxation: People with no outside interests, hobbies, or ways to relax may be unable to handle stressful situations because they have no outlet for their stress.

AN INDIVIDUAL STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- Make an effort to stop negative thoughts.
- Plan some fun.
- Refocus the negative into the positive.
- Take a break.
- Think positively.

Physical activity:

- Start a physical activity program. Most experts recommend doing 20 minutes of aerobic activity three times per week.
- Decide on a specific time, type, amount, and level of physical activity. Fit this time into your schedule so it can be part of your routine.
- Find a buddy to exercise with -- it is more fun and it will encourage you to stick with your routine.
- You do not have to join a gym -- 20 minutes of brisk walking outdoors will do the trick.

Nutrition:

- Plan to eat foods that improve your health and well-being. For example, increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat.
- Use the [food guide pyramid](#) to help you make healthy food choices.
- Eat the right amount of food on a regular schedule.

Social support:

- Make an effort to interact socially with people. Even though you feel stressed, you will be glad to meet your friends, if only to get your mind off of things.
- Nurture yourself and others.
- Reach out to other people.

Relaxation:

- Learn about and try using one or more of the many relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery, listening to music, or practicing yoga or meditation. One or more of these techniques should work for you.
- Listen to your body.
- Take a mini retreat.
- Take time for personal interests and hobbies.

RESOURCES

If these stress management techniques do not work for you, there are professionals, such as

licensed social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, who can help. Schedule time with one of these mental health professionals to help you learn stress management strategies, including relaxation techniques. [Support groups](#) of various types are also available through the community.