

Address Your Stress for a Healthier Life Today!



Stress is the most common cause of ill health in our society, probably underlying as many as 70% of all visits to family doctors. It is also the one problem that every doctor shares with every patient.

What Are the Causes of Stress?

External stressors include:

- Physical environment: noise, bright lights, heat, confined spaces.
- Social (interaction with people): rudeness, bossiness or aggressiveness on the part of someone else.
- Organizational: rules, regulations, "red tape," deadlines.
- Major life events: death of a relative, lost job, promotion, new baby.
- Daily hassles: commuting, misplacing keys, mechanical breakdowns.

Internal stressors include:

- Lifestyle choices: caffeine, not enough sleep, overloaded schedule.
- Negative self-talk: pessimistic thinking, self-criticism, over-analyzing.
- Mind traps: unrealistic expectations, taking things personally, all-or-nothing thinking, exaggerating and rigid thinking.
- Stressful personality traits: Type A, perfectionist, workaholic, pleaser.

It is important to note that most of the stress that most of us have is actually self-generated. This is a paradox because so many people think of external stressors when they are upset (it is the weather, the boss, the children, the spouse, the stock market). Recognizing that we create most of our own upsets, however, is an important first step to dealing with them.

What Are Some Ways to Master Stress?

The following are some categories that can be helpful in mastering stress:

Change lifestyle habits.

- Decrease caffeine (coffee, tea, colas, chocolate).
- Well-balanced diet.
- Decrease consumption of junk food.
- Eat slowly.
- Regular exercise (at least 30 minutes, three times per week).
- Adequate sleep (figure out what you need, and then get it).
- Leisure time (do something for yourself everyday).
- Relaxation exercises (e.g., meditation, listening to music, guided imagery).

Change stressful situations.

- Time and money management.
- Assertiveness.
- Problem-solving.
- Possibly leaving a job or a relationship.

Change your thinking.

- Look at things more positively.
- See problems as opportunities.
- Refute negative thoughts.
- Keep a sense of humor.

Diversion and distraction. Take a time-out (anything from a short walk to a vacation) to get away from the things that are bothering you. This will not resolve the problem, but it gives you a break and a chance for your stress levels to decrease. Then, you can return to deal with issues feeling more rested and in a better frame of mind.

References

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