

FIT 4 LIFE



STRESS: What Is It? How To Deal With It.

STRESS: WHAT IS IT?

Stress is the body's response to any demand. It can be positive or negative. Everyone deals with stress differently. A mild or temporary stress reaction can be good. It helps you handle emergencies or do your best work. It may give you a pleasant feeling of excitement, but a severe stress reaction that persists over long period of time can cause problems.

There are no particular set of factors that cause stress. It can come from pressures at home, at work, in the environment or from personal matters. If one is given too much responsibility or information or is trying to deal with too many changes, they become overloaded. The more stress you have in a shorter period of time the more severe the effects. How you deal with the various stressors can either reduce or add to your overall stress.

There are three stages of stress:

Alarm is the first stage. You become more alert and prepare for hard physical work. This is often referred to as the "flight or fight" response.

Resistance is the second stage. You work to cope with whatever demands you are facing.

Exhaustion is the third stage. If the demands are still present after your ability to cope is reduced, you experience exhaustion.



POSITIVE STRESS

Positive stress can provide extra momentum and boost productivity. When one is searching for a new home, preparing for the holidays or preparing for a baby they are experiencing positive stress. This type of stress can motivate you, in short term, gives you feelings of excitement, can improve performance, is pleasant and beneficial, is vital for physical and mental fitness and focuses energies to sharpen the mind.

NEGATIVE STRESS

Negative stress on the other hand can cause distress and can be harmful. If one maintains the "flight or fight" response day after day it soon takes it's toll on the physical and emotional health. Negative stress is often associated with the death of a spouse, divorce, illness, job problems and financial troubles—it drains the energy reserves and keeps you on edge. It doesn't fade but builds, can lead to mental and physical problems and can be cured with relaxation and healthy lifestyles.

HOW TO COPE WITH STRESS

One of the six elements of wellness is stress management. The others are: exercise on a regular basis, practice good nutrition, maintain a healthy weight, sustain from chemical dependency and practice safety habits.

As we look at ways to deal with stress, we need to try and identify what the stressors are. Some of the energy zappers which we can work to eliminate in our lives are: negative people, worry, negative self-talk and poor health habits.

Use visualization to produce a calm and peaceful situation. Mentally go to your favorite place and try to unwind.

Get support from others around you to deal



with the stressful event. If you prepare for a move, a baby, the holidays or some other major event, ask for help. You will help lower your stress load in doing so, develop a sense of "we" and enhance relationships.

Try to use humor. Remind yourself to have fun: take a laughter break, smile, maintain a "chuckle book" of your favorite cartoons or clippings, surround yourself with upbeat people and practice humor, as the more you practice it the more you'll see the lighter side of situations.

Become playful by making a list of activities that make you feel good. Make time for play. Keep a light attitude and try something new. We often get locked into a pattern and don't allow the creative juices to flow by stimulating our minds and bodies to do a different activity.

Finally, remember to breathe fully. Deep "belly" breathing helps to relieve tension. It relaxes the diaphragm and slows the heart rate. To perform this technique: breathe in through your nose, pressing your stomach outward. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then breathe out through your mouth. Repeat this several times, three or four times a day.

All in all, stress management means taking steps to control the stressors and dealing with the change in emotions due to stress.

As you learn time management techniques, talk out your problems with friends and family, balance work with play, set realistic goals, anticipate the stress and find help when needed. This will help you successfully manage your stress and maintain a positive outlook on your day to day commitments.