

# Mental Health Matters

## Plain Talk about Stress



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Stress is with us all the time. It comes from mental activity and physical activity. It is unique and personal to each of us. Too much emotional stress can cause physical illnesses such as high blood

pressure, ulcers, or even heart disease.

Hans Selye, M.D., a recognized expert in the field, has defined stress as a “non-specific response of the body to a demand.” The important issue is learning how our bodies respond to these demands. When stress becomes prolonged or particularly frustrating, it can become harmful. Recognizing the early signs of stress and then doing something about them can make an important difference in the quality of your life.

### Dealing with Stress

When stress does occur, it is important to recognize and deal with it. Here are some suggestions for ways to handle stress. As you begin to understand more about how stress affects you as an individual, you will come up with your own ideas of helping to ease the tensions.

- Try physical activity. When you are nervous, angry, or upset, release the pressure through exercise or physical activity. Running, walking, playing tennis, or working in your garden are just some of the activities you might try. Physical exercise will relieve that “up tight” feeling.
- Must you always be right? Do other people upset you – particularly when they don’t do things your way? Try cooperation instead of confrontation. A little give and take on both sides will reduce the strain and make you both feel more comfortable.
- Share your stress. It helps to talk to someone about your concerns and worries. Perhaps a friend, family member, teacher, or counselor can help you see your problem in a different light. If you feel your problem is serious, you might seek

professional help. Knowing when to ask for help may avoid more serious problems later.

- Know your limits. If a problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed at the moment, don’t fight the situation. Learn to accept what is – for now – until such time when you can change it.
- Take care of yourself. Get enough rest and eat well. If you are irritable and tense from lack of sleep or if you are not eating correctly, you will have less ability to deal with stressful situations.
- Make time for fun. Schedule time for both work and recreation. Play can be just as important to your well being as work; you need a break from your daily routine to just relax and have fun.
- Check off your tasks. Trying to take care of everything at once can seem overwhelming, and, as a result, you may not accomplish anything. Instead, make a list of what tasks you have to do, then do one at a time, checking them off as they’re completed.
- Create a quiet scene. You can’t always run away, but a quiet scene painted mentally can take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation.
- Avoid self-medication. Although you can use prescription or over-counter medications to relieve stress temporarily, they do not remove the conditions that caused the stress in the first place. Medications may also be habit forming and should only be taken on the advice of your doctor.

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