

BREATHE EASY BULLETIN

Providing support during times of personal growth, distress, and life transitions.

SEPTEMBER 2015

Keys to Stress Management

Understand the consequences of stress.

Complete the **Stress Symptom Checklist** on the next page to get an overview of the effect stress is having in your daily life. Recognizing the harm stress is causing can motivate you to make some changes.

Identify internal and external sources of stress. Internal sources involve your thought processes, ways of viewing the world, and your belief system. External sources are related to your daily experiences and can include major life events or transitions, your job, and relationships.

Learn ways to avoid, remedy, or remove sources of stress you can control. For example, if credit card debt is a major stressor for you, you might develop a plan to tackle it by decreasing spending, increasing income, paying a little at a time, or some combination of those and other techniques. Remember that hostile work environments can be left, toxic relationships can be ended, and items on your to-do list can be reprioritized. It won't always be easy, but choosing to do nothing is sometimes the same as choosing to keep what you've got.

Learn how to cope and adjust to sources of stress that are out of your control. You cannot change how others behave, feel, or respond to you. You CAN change how you react to a demanding boss and how you adjust to unexpected changes at home, work, and in relationships. Letting go of unrealistic expectations you have of others, accepting that some people and situations are difficult or unfair, and choosing not to participate in unhealthy interactions can lead to a less stressful day.

Build resilience by focusing on the maintenance and improvement of personal characteristics, habits, and skills that promote physical health and emotional wellness. It is also important to reduce or eliminate those habits and traits that promote stress.

Habits that Promote Stress

- Negative self-talk and being overly critical of yourself and others
- Having unreasonable expectations of yourself and others
- Poor time management or disorganization
- Procrastination
- Perfectionism
- Being overly sensitive
- Having poor boundaries or no boundaries
- Expecting others to know what you need rather than telling them
- Carrying grudges or letting anger build without addressing the source
- Blaming others for your experiences rather than accepting personal responsibility in areas that you can control

Habits that Help Manage Stress:

- Social interaction and activities
- Purposeful activity such as a hobby
- Time management and organization
- Spending time and being active with pets
- Eating healthy meals and snacks
- Getting 7-8 hours of restful sleep per night
- Regular exercise like walking
- Limiting alcohol and caffeine use
- Humor-laughing everyday
- Being altruistic and doing nice things for others

Learning to deal with stress is learning to deal differently with life.

—John D. Adams, expert on workplace health and stress

DO YOU HAVE THE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS?

Complete this Stress Symptom Checklist

Physical Signs:

- Headaches
- Muscle tension or pain
- Fatigue/Low energy
- Sexual problems
- Stomach upset
- Increased blood pressure
- Frequent colds
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain or loss

Emotional Signs:

- Anxiety or panic
- Lack of motivation
- Mood swings
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or crying spells
- Low self-esteem
- Hopelessness
- Impatience
- Difficulty experiencing joy

Behavioral Signs:

- Change in eating habits or appetite
- Angry or emotional outbursts
- Increased drug, alcohol, or tobacco use
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Social isolation/spending less time with others
- Increased absences from work
- Decreased attention to appearance
- Neglect of responsibilities

Thought Patterns

- Racing thoughts
- Decreased concentration
- Constant worry
- Imagine the worst
- Focus on the negative



Feeling Overwhelmed or Stressed Out?

Stress has physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioral consequences. **If your stress symptoms are making it difficult to function at home, at work, or in relationships, they may be signs of a more serious challenge like depression or anxiety.** Help is available so you manage your symptoms, improve mood, and develop coping skills to overcome life stressors.

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Breathe Easy Bulletin for free by e-mail?
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STRESS SURVIVAL TIP: SLEEP

Lack of sleep has a negative impact on mood, memory, performance, judgment, reaction time, learning ability, and the immune system. Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep per night. If you need a nap during the day, aim for 30 minutes or less.