

STRESS

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Stress

Fact:

Even good changes, like marriage or a promotion, can cause stress.

Fiction:

It's a myth that all stress is bad.

Prevention:

Maintaining balance can help when stressful events occur.

Treatment:

Nutrition, exercise and therapy all have their place.

Stress. It's a part of life that can feel out of hand.

Understanding Stress

Researchers define stress as the psychological and physiological conditions that a person experiences when a situation is perceived as threatening, harmful or demanding. Stress is in the eye of the beholder.

While negative events can be stressful, so can positive changes. Getting married, being promoted at work, taking that trip to Europe, and moving to that great new home can all create stress.

Who Gets Stressed?

Picture an awards ceremony before an audience of hundreds of people. Two people are called to the front to accept an award and make a few remarks. The first is a professional politician, the second a young high school student. Chances are that the second feels more stress.

The more effective people feel in a given situation, the better they cope. The benefit to thinking you are effective is that you're more likely to take changes and success in stride—which reinforces your belief that you are effective.

Psychologists say we respond to stress with these steps:

First, during primary appraisal we:

- Decide if the situation is threatening
- Evaluate our resources
- Choose what to do

We do something to limit the impact of the stress, then engage in a process called secondary appraisal to see if our efforts worked. We continue to appraise the situation until it changes or until it no longer causes us stress.

We are likely to feel less stress if we feel competent to deal with the situation. We are likely to feel more stress if we feel in over our heads. Illness, tiredness and drug or alcohol use can also increase our stress over situations that we might otherwise take in stride.

Symptoms of Stress

The stressed person may:

- Feel like there's too much to do and not enough time
- Feel crazy
- Get stomachaches or heartburn
- Feel less pleasure in activities that were previously enjoyable
- Neglect responsibilities
- Have tense muscles
- Be irritable
- Eat poorly
- Use drugs carelessly or recreationally
- Get sick often
- Have trouble sleeping

Prevention

There's no way to prevent all stressful events. The best way to prevent stress from becoming overwhelming is to maintain balance in the face of change. A healthy lifestyle can also prevent things from getting out of hand.

Treatment

Good nutrition and regular exercise can help reduce stress. So can obtaining help when needed, and avoiding overcommitment. Therapy can also help the person:

- Learn to say no
- More successfully handle stressful situations
- Identify and repair problem relationships

In some cases, medication can help.

* IntelliHealth

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