



Stress Management

The “Who, What, Where, When, and Whys” of Stress

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Burnout, “...the gradual process by which a person, in response to prolonged stress and physical, mental, and emotional strain, detaches from work and other meaningful relationships.”

—Mark Gorkin

It really doesn't matter if your body is digesting your scrambled eggs from breakfast if you're nose to nose with a grizzly bear. All your energy goes to surviving the immediate threat.

WHO is vulnerable to stress?

Anyone can experience stress-related difficulties. Women, particularly working mothers are considered to be at high risk for stress. Also at higher risk are people who are unemployed and those living without health insurance. People who live in cities tend to experience more stress than those in rural areas. People who are targets of discrimination and people who are physically or socially isolated tend to have higher stress levels than their peers.

WHAT is the impact of unmanaged stress?

It is estimated that 75-90% of all physicians' office visits are for stress-related complaints. Stress is so prevalent that the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has declared stress a workplace hazard. Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.

WHERE does stress come from?

Because stress relates to the body's natural response to perceived threat, adverse physical conditions such as danger, pain, and hunger can trigger the stress response. Other everyday sources of stress include financial worries, work demands, relationship/family problems, and hectic schedules. We should not underestimate the power of the media to stress us out. A classic marketing ploy is “fear appeal” — creating fear that if we

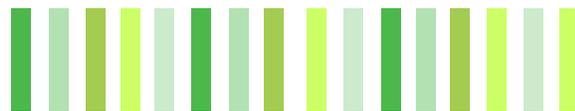
don't have a certain product, something bad will happen (for example, they will see you sweat, something you should “never” let them do).

WHEN does our ability to manage stress develop?

It appears that some people are born with certain traits that make them more or less vulnerable to the effects of stress. Additionally, early nurturing plays a vital role in brain development and the brain's response to stress. For example, if an infant learns that expressing hunger via crying will lead to relief (being fed) in a short time, they will eventually learn to self-soothe (stress manage) for a short time. However, if relief does not come for long periods of time — for example, in a neglectful environment — efforts to self-soothe / stress-manage are fruitless. Subsequently, fundamental stress-management skills could fail to develop.

WHY is stress management necessary?

Unmanaged stress can lead to a multitude of physical and mental health conditions and can impede the body's ability to effectively protect and repair itself. Another possible outcome of unmanaged stress is Burnout, “...the gradual process by which a person, in response to prolonged stress and physical, mental, and emotional strain, detaches from work and other meaningful relationships.” (Mark Gorkin)



Stress & the Fight-or-Flight Connection



In and of itself, stress is not a bad thing. It originates from “fight-or-flight” — our instinct to survive. During fight-or-flight, our bodies become active to fight if we have to and flee if we can. Physiological reactions include rapid breathing and up to a 300-400% increase in blood flow to move more oxygen through the blood stream to the brain, organs, and muscles that will facilitate fighting or fleeing. Our immune system kicks into high gear, sending out infection-fighters in case of injury. Anything non-essential to immediate survival — the digestive system, for example — slows or shuts down. Of course, the brain is coordinating all of this via bio-chemical changes such as the release of Adrenaline and hormones associated with stress, such as Cortisol.

Typically, physical action exhausts these stress hormones and the body returns to its normal functioning. Problems are less likely to result from acute stress than from chronic stress. The body was not intended to operate in “fight-or-flight” mode for long periods of time. When stress responders are chronically over-activated, physical and psychological damage can occur.

Common problems associated with chronic stress include: heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, increased susceptibility to infections, gastro-intestinal problems (ex. ulcers, Irritable Bowel Syndrome), sleep disturbances, weight changes, headaches, dizziness, Depression, and Anxiety. People may also exhibit problems with memory and concentration.

Stress Management — A Physical Approach

Because the stress response involves physiological reactions, not surprisingly, taking physical action can exhaust stress hormones. Fortunately, it does not have to be fighting or fleeing — any physical action will have benefit. That makes exercise an important stress-relieving technique.

The good news is, you don’t have to follow a regimented fitness routine to reduce stress. Any type of physical activity can be beneficial, from aerobics to yoga to dancing to the radio. Not only does physical activity reduce (“work out”) stress hormones, but it also increases production of endorphins, our brains’ “happy” chemicals (which can in turn reduce symptoms of Depression and Anxiety often associated with chronic stress).

Sleep and stress have the capacity to influence each other in a vicious cycle. Lack of quality sleep can increase stress, while the rise in stress hormones (like Cortisol) can negatively impact quality of sleep. Developing your sleep hygiene can go a long way toward regularizing your sleep to help you ward off the effects of stress. Sleep hygiene refers to the routines we develop before

bed to prepare our body & mind for sleep. Some suggestions include: stick to the same sleep / awakening schedule, even on the weekend; avoid over-stimulation prior to bed, such as watching TV, playing video games, and bright lighting; avoid stimulants such as nicotine and caffeine at least 3-4 hours (or longer, if needed) before bed.

Our diet can also play a role in our ability to effectively manage stress. Ironically, the things we tend to crave when we’re feeling stressed are typically the things that are the worst for us. Sugar, processed grains (white bread, pasta, cake / cookies, etc.), and caffeine are three of the biggest culprits. As stress wears us down, we often look to these foods to provide a boost, which they usually do. However, this boost is short-lived and we then tend to “crash” — often feeling worse than before.

Our body often gives us the first signs that stress is taking its toll, via headaches and fatigue. Taking care of our body is one of the best tools we have to keep stress in check.





Additional Resources:

De-stressing Mantras:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/25/positive-affirmations-de-stressing-mantras_n_3047604.html

Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

<http://www.guidetopsychology.com/pmr.htm>

Meditation:

<http://life.gaiam.com/article/meditation-101-techniques-benefits-beginner-s-how>

Deep breathing:

<http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>

"There's never enough time to do all the nothing you want."

~Bill Watterson,
Calvin and Hobbes

"Stress is like spice - in the right proportion it enhances the flavor of a dish. Too little produces a bland, dull meal; too much may choke you."

~Donald Tubesing

"When we long for life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure."

– Peter Marshall

Stress Management — A Cognitive Approach

There are two basic ways we can address stress in our lives: change the stressor or change our reaction to it. If we know certain situations are “triggers” for us, we can try to avoid them when possible. If we can’t avoid the situation altogether, we may be able to alter it. For example, being more assertive or improving our time management skills may make the situation easier for us to deal with in the present and less likely to occur in the future.

We can change our reaction to stress in a variety of ways. Our thoughts can have a huge impact on how we respond to stressors. Negative self-talk (“should-have, could-have, if-only-I-would-haves”) creates emotional tension that triggers stress responders in the body. The first step is to catch yourself when you are thinking negative thoughts and consciously — with intent — replace those thoughts with a positive, more productive thought. For some, a mantra — a simple uplifting phrase you repeat to yourself — can be helpful.

Sometimes we simply need to leave the stressor behind for awhile and shift our focus. When life gets stressful it can be difficult to find solutions — you “can’t see the forest for the trees.” Practicing Diversion Skills can help us take a break and refresh our bodies and minds. Sometimes we are more likely to find a solution when we *stop* thinking about the

problem for awhile. Diversion Skills include: learning something new, making or listening to music, volunteering, getting away, and hobbies. Whatever works for you to take your mind off of your troubles for awhile. It doesn’t have to be expensive or time-consuming. For example, “getting away” doesn’t have to mean a vacation to the Bahamas — it can be as simple as a walk around the block or a cup of coffee with a good friend.

Sometimes it’s about giving ourselves permission. Permission to play — to do something purely for the enjoyment of it. To have fun and to laugh. For most people, laughter is good medicine. A study out of CA Loma Linda University Medical Center showed that laughter results in an increase in endorphins as well as a decrease in stress-related hormones such as Cortisol and adrenaline (1989). Make an effort to put more humor into your life. Collect things that make you laugh (cartoons, articles, pictures of family or pets being silly) and create your own Humor Stress Relief Kit.

Many stress-management approaches involve both the body and the mind, such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation, deep breathing, meditation, and even exercise.

Ultimately, the best stress management technique is the one that works for you.



MILESTONE HCQU NORTHWEST

STRESS MANAGEMENT TEST

Name: _____

Role/Title: _____

Agency: _____

Date: _____

Please provide contact information (email address, fax number, or mailing address) where you would like your certificate to be sent: _____

You must submit your completed test (and evaluation), with at least a score of 80%, to receive ½ hour of training credit for this course.

- * via fax: 814-728-8887. Please fax only the test and evaluation, not the entire training packet.
- * via email to HCQUNW@MilestonePA.org: Please put "Stress Management Test" in the subject line, and the numbers 1—5, along with your answers, in the body of the email, OR scan the test and evaluations pages and email as attachments.
- * via mail: Milestone HCQU NW, 247 Hospital Drive, Warren PA 16365.

True or False:

1. People who experienced early childhood neglect may have difficulty managing stress throughout their lives. **True** **False**
2. The digestive system, essential to our immediate survival, kicks into high gear when we are threatened. **True** **False**
3. In order for exercise to be an effective stress management tool, you must follow a regimented exercise routine. **True** **False**
4. Headaches and fatigue are often the first signs of stress overload. **True** **False**
5. Laughter has been found to decrease levels of stress hormones in the body. **True** **False**



EVALUATION OF TRAINING

Training Title: Stress Management

Date: _____

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Direct Support Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Provider Administrator/Supervisor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Program Specialist | <input type="checkbox"/> Provider Clinical Staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer/Self-Advocate | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support Coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Support Coordinator Supervisor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PCH Staff/Administrator | <input type="checkbox"/> County MH/MR/IDD |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FLP/LSP | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list): _____ |

Please circle your PRIMARY reason for completing this home-study training:

- It's mandatory
 interested in subject matter
 need training hours
 convenience

Please circle the best response to each question.

5 = Strongly Agree
 4 = Agree
 3 = Undecided
 2 = Disagree
 1 = Strongly Disagree

- | 1. As a result of this training, I have increased my knowledge. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. I learned something I can use in my own situation. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. This training provided needed information. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. The training material was helpful and effective. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. Overall, I am satisfied with this training. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. I am glad I completed this training. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Suggestions for improvement: _____

Additional information I feel should have been included in this training: _____

I would like to see these topics/conditions developed into home-study trainings: _____