



STRESS

Stress. Many of us are faced with it every day, but we might not know how to deal with it.

It’s important to learn how to handle stress, because it can affect our performance and relationships both in our work and at home. At work, stress can lead to distraction and cause an unfortunate accident. At home, stress can put a strain on family relationships. Stress usually occurs when there are changes in our lives and when we feel that we don’t have enough resources to deal with those changes and demands.

Which of the following do you think causes stress: getting married, winning the lottery, or having an argument? It is *all* of them. Stress can occur not only from negative life experiences, but also from positive ones. People react and deal with stress differently, but common stress symptoms include upset stomach, fatigue, tight neck muscles, irritability and headaches. Some people react to stress by eating or drinking too much, losing sleep or smoking. Stress may also make you more susceptible to illness, including the common cold, ulcers and even some cancers.

The first step to managing stress is to identify your “stressors”—those things that make you react. Stressors may not only be events that cause you to feel sad, frightened, anxious or happy; you can *cause* stress through your thoughts, feelings and expectations. Look at the list below. Which of these cause *you* stress? Can you think of other stressors?

- *Not enough time*
- *Unexpected change*
- *Family/relationship problems*
- *Extra responsibility*
- *Personality clashes*
- *Money difficulties*

Of course, everyone has to deal with life’s problems. And key to dealing with the big and little everyday stressors is coping with stress in a *positive* way, using a few primary methods:

- 1. Acceptance** Many of us worry about things over which we have no control, such as a family illness, a great deal of change at work, or finding out that your basketball team lost. One way to manage stress is to accept when things are beyond your control. It may be helpful to think positive thoughts such as, “Someday I’ll laugh about this” or “It’s a learning experience!”
- 2. Attitude** Try to focus on the positive side of situations. Ask yourself, “What good can come out of this? What can I learn from this situation?” and “How can I handle this better when it comes up again?” Solutions come easier when you focus on the positive—and your stress level will be reduced.
- 3. Perspective** We often worry about things that never happen. Keep things in perspective by asking yourself, “How important is this situation? Can I do anything about it? In five years, will I even remember it happened?”

Think about the situations in your life that cause you stress. Are they important or unimportant? Are they controllable or uncontrollable? If they are controllable events, you can take action to change the situation. However, if they are uncontrollable, use acceptance, attitude and perspective to reduce the stress.

