

## Stress: Mind/Body Health

Many decades ago I worked at a television station in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Producing a daily news show became my definition of stress. Try visiting a local station 10 minutes before going on-the-air (or during a broadcast, for that matter) and you will know what I mean. However, all this stress swirling in the air added to the “high” feeling when the news program came to a close and another successful show became history. This is called “good stress”, the kind that motivates you to get a job done. But the majority of us would probably agree that for the most part we identify with stress as being negative and unpleasant.

How you respond to stress may have a direct affect on how you feel physically. It is a scientific fact that how you cope with stress determines your appetite, body composition and overall fitness level. Chronic, unrelenting stress can have dangerous, even life-threatening effects on the body. The chemical change in the body produced during and after stress can make you more vulnerable to colds, flu, fatigue and infections. Extended reactions to stress can alter the body's immune system in ways that are associated with “aging” conditions such as frailty, functional decline, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, inflammatory arthritis, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. People experiencing stress are more likely to report feeling nervous or sad, symptoms of fatigue, inability to sleep or sleeping too much, lack of interest, motivation or energy and headaches. Stress can also complicate your ability to recover from a serious illness. However, stress management training is a proven method for helping speed recovery following a heart attack.

A study conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that women feel the effects of stress on their physical health more than men do. The study also found that Americans engage in unhealthy conduct such as comfort eating, poor diet choices, smoking and inactivity to help deal with

stress, and people experiencing stress are more likely to report hypertension, anxiety, depression and obesity.

Okay, since women, parents, and people of working age are concerned about the amount of stress in their lives, what is causing the stress, and more importantly what can we do about controlling it? Well, you may identify with the leading sources of stress: work, money, health concerns and children. Once you identify the cause of your stress, you may find that it arises from something that is not so easy to correct. When needed a psychologist can help you define and analyze the stresses in your life and develop action plans for dealing with them.

Once defined and analyzed the next advice the APA gives is to monitor your moods. If you feel stressed during the day, write down what caused it along with your thoughts and moods. You just may find the cause to be less serious that you thought.

Make time for yourself during the week. Even if it is just ten minutes a day, turn off the phone, spend time alone, exercise, meditate or listen to your favorite music. This can help refresh your mental outlook and slow down your body's stress response systems.

Walk away when you are angry. Before reacting count to ten to mentally regroup, then look at the situation again. Walking or other physical activities can help you to work off some of that steam.

Analyze your schedule. Assess your priorities and delegate whatever tasks you can. Try eliminating tasks that are "shoulds" but not "musts."

Finally, set reasonable standards for yourself and others. Perfection is a lot to expect of anyone.