

Dealing with Stress in Challenging Times

Learn the signs of stress and how you can reduce it in your life

Recognize the signs and acknowledge your reactions...

COMMON SIGNS AND SIGNALS OF A STRESS REACTION

PHYSICAL	MENTAL	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL
Fatigue	Tendency to blame others	Anxiety	Changes in normal activities
Insomnia	Confusion	Survivor guilt/self-blame	Change in speech
Muscle tremors	Poor attention	Grief	Withdrawal from others
Twitches	Inability to make decisions	Denial	Emotional outbursts
Difficulty breathing	Flashbacks	Apathy/boredom	Appetite disturbance
Rapid breathing	Poor concentration	Emotional numbness	Suspiciousness
Elevated blood pressure	Forgetfulness	Uncertainty	Inability to rest
Rapid heartbeat	Trouble identifying known objects or people	Agitation	Substance abuse
Chest pain	Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	Irritability	Intensified startle reflex
Headaches	Poor problem-solving	Depression	Accident prone
Visual difficulties	Loss of sense of time, place or person	Lack of capacity for enjoyment	Pacing
Nausea/vomiting	Search for meaning	Apprehension	Prolonged silences
Weakness/dizziness	Nightmares	Mistrust	Decreased personal hygiene
Hunger	Inescapable images		Diminished sexual drive

Continued: Dealing with Stress in Challenging Times

Try the following strategies to reduce stress in your life:

- **Identify what you have been doing to help yourself cope, and think about what's working and what's not.** Do more of what works and try the opposite of what doesn't...
- **If talking to friends and family helps, be sure you keep talking.** However, if you find yourself talking about "it" all of the time or "it bums you out," limit yourself to one or two conversations a day.
- **Make a list of things, small and large, that make you feel good and do at least three a day.** Treat yourself to something you haven't done in awhile (listen to music, take a ride in the car, get or give a massage, go to the movies, call a friend you haven't seen in a while, have an ice cream cone).
- **Try to maintain healthy habits.** If possible, eat and sleep well, and get some exercise even if you don't feel like it. Rake leaves, take a walk, clean the car or your house, or jog.
- **Minimize your use of alcohol or other non-prescription mood altering substances.** Take medication as prescribed.
- **Maintain routine activity, unless your schedule is hectic and stress-inducing.** If that is the case, "give yourself a break" and eliminate an activity and do something nice for yourself instead.
- **Think about what makes you laugh and do more of that.** Play with your child or dog, read the comics, listen to your favorite comedy tape or rent a funny old movie.
- **Make your "self talk" messages honest, realistic, comforting and positive.** We all talk to ourselves regularly. If I'm saying in my head, "This is awful, I can't believe this is happening, what's going to happen next?" I might change my message to, "A terrible thing has happened to some people. I'm going to take good care of myself and do everything I can to protect and take care of the people around me."
- **Congratulate yourself on continuing to function in these difficult times.** Give yourself and others some "slack." Practice "random acts of kindness" and feel good about it.
- **Do what you can to be in control of your situation and needs.** Follow safety instructions. Take extra care to listen to yourself. Do something that will be a real accomplishment that you've put off but needs to be done.
- **If you have severe physical symptoms, consult a physician.**

