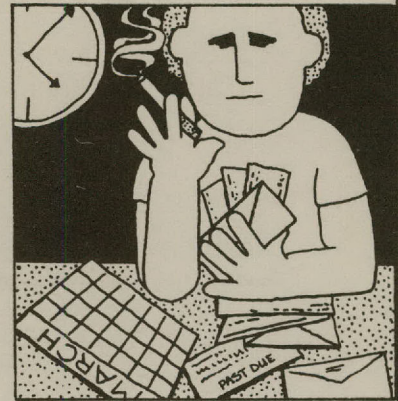


STRESS

Stress is your body's reaction to the demands of day-to-day living. To feel stress is normal. However, the amount of stress each of us can handle differs from person to person.

Any event can be stressful. Things like moving to a new house, losing a job, having too many bills, or getting married are examples. It is how YOU view or feel about an event that determines whether or not it is stressful for you.



THE FACTS

When under stress, your brain sends signals to release adrenalin in your body. Your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and muscle tension will all go up quickly.

Under normal stress, your body responds to the demands made upon it. Then it returns to its normal relaxed state. But if you are under a lot of stress, or the stress lasts a long time, you may not be able to return to your normal relaxed state. When this happens, you may not feel well. You can even become ill.

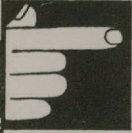


THE RISKS

Stress is not the cause of illness, but it greatly adds to it. Some of the health problems related to stress are headaches, neck and back pain, ulcers, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, mental illness and suicide.

Your body will send out certain signals when you are feeling stressed. Some of the signs to watch for are:

- Increased smoking, alcohol use or caffeine use.
- No appetite or eating too much.
- Upset stomach.
- Lack of sleep.
- Teeth grinding.
- Muscle aches.
- Feeling tired, cranky or depressed.
- Feeling unhappy with your life.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Watch for and try to match the signs of stress with the event or events which may be causing the stress. (For example, what took place just before you became aware of the stress?)
2. Become aware of how you react to stressful events. (For example, do you always get a headache when paying bills?)
3. Think about and ask others about ways you can deal with or avoid stressful events in your life.
4. Build up extra energy to help you cope with stress:
 - a. Take time to relax each day. Try deep breathing exercises or quiet thinking. These help slow your heart rate and relax your muscles.
 - b. Get regular exercise. This will help you release tension, tone your muscles and strengthen your heart and lungs.
 - c. Eat a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, grains, meat and milk to raise your energy level.
5. Talk with family and friends about your day's events in which you felt glad, sad, mad or scared.
6. It may be difficult for parents with young children to relax. Try these suggestions:
 - a. Take turns with your spouse watching the children so each of you has time alone.
 - b. Offer to babysit neighbors/friends children in exchange for the same service.

If these tips don't help, or you feel your stress is getting worse, seek help. Many programs exist to help you learn to deal with stress. Ask your health care provider about programs in your area.



DO IT TODAY

- Take a close look at your day-to-day life. Make a list of the stresses in your life and how you respond to each one.
- Take a five minute break to rest and relax each hour.

