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Keys to Total Health

PRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION, SCHOOL OF HEALTH

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How to Cope with Stress

One of the most important questions you will ever answer for yourself is, "How am I going to deal with stress?" Why is this so important? Because the way you answer that question will determine to a great extent your ability to live above certain types of various diseases, such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, and even cancer. So for the next three lessons we are going to be concerned with various phases of stress. Many of the secrets of happiness and success depend upon how a person handles this thing called "stress". How does a person cope with stress?

First of all, we must define stress. What is it in your life? What is the most stressful experience that you face day in and day out? Everyone has some stress in his life; if he didn't, he probably wouldn't get out of bed in the morning! Sometimes people feel their stressful events are worse than everyone else's, or that they have more stress than they can handle.

Menninger Psychiatric Foundation suggests that people should take time to look at themselves and ask these questions:

1. What are my goals in life and how realistic are they?
2. Is my use of time and energy helping me to reach these goals?
3. Do I have a proper sense of responsibility, or do I try to do too much and fail to acknowledge my limitations?
4. How do I react to disappointments and losses?
5. How am I coping with stress and anxiety?
6. What is the consistency and quality of my personal relationships? Are my contacts with others superficial, meager and unrewarding?
7. From whom do I receive and to whom do I give emotional support? Do I avoid getting support from others for fear of appearing weak?
8. What is the role of love in my life? How much time do I give to listen and to care for others?

At the end of this self-examination, a person should have a good idea of whether there are serious problems in his/her career or personal relationships. Being honest with one's self is a great and giant step forward in solving the personal problems that we encounter.

Dr. William Menninger, former President of the American Psychiatric Association, President of the Menninger Foundation and guiding light of the famed Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas is one of the world authorities in the field of mental health. He offers 13 questions as a spot check on your mental health.



1. Are you always worrying?
2. Are you unable to concentrate because of unrecognized reasons?
3. Are you continually unhappy without justified cause?
4. Do you lose your temper easily and often?
5. Are you troubled by regular insomnia?
6. Do you have wide fluctuations in your mood from depression to elation and back to depression, which incapacitate you?
7. Do you continually dislike to be with people?
8. Are you upset if the routine of your life is disturbed?
9. Do your children consistently get on your nerves?
10. Are you irascible and constantly bitter?
11. Are you afraid without real cause?
12. Are you always right and the other person always wrong?
13. Do you have numerous aches and pains for which no doctor can find a physical cause?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, then consider it a warning signal. Your mental health may not be up to par, especially if these symptoms become more and more pronounced. If they do, you need help.

Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman have come up with personality Types A and B. Let's briefly describe the person with Type A response to stress. He's the man (or woman) who thinks he is the toughest and can overcome any of life's problems. He doesn't realize that he is allowing his personality to kill him. Usually he is an intelligent, aggressive, ambitious, hard driving, competitive type, who is characterized by being hurried and impatient. He often has an obsessive sense of time urgency, trying to produce more, to get one more meeting, to make one more phone call, crowd one more event into an already swollen schedule. His throttle is always pushed against the floor board.

Type B behavior is the opposite. This person is relaxed. He doesn't rush around. He sets realistic goals. You are a Type B person if you do not have Type A characteristics. You do not suffer from a sense of time urgency. You harbor no free-floating hostility and feel no compulsive need to display or discuss either your achievements or your accomplishments. When you play, you do so to find fun and relaxation. You can relax without guilt just as you work without agitation. Most of us possess characteristics of both Type A and Type B personalities.

Dr. Friedman suggests the following way to modify Type A behavior: 1. Don't play the numbers game. Quality was never dependent on quantity. 2. Plan your days to have fewer events in them. Set priorities. We might add the importance of clarifying your values and making value judgments, eliminating those things that are not as essential as some of the important items in your life. 3. Learn to depend on others more. 4. Admit you can and will make mistakes.

We are all subjected to stress-producing events. It is how we react to them that is important.

Dr. Friedman also makes several physically-oriented suggestions for controlling stress: 1. Drastically reduce the intake of dietary cholesterol and animal fat. 2. Gear up your physical activity. More walking, more running, more exercising, less sitting. 3. Exclude cigarette smoking from your life. He suggests, "If I were God, perhaps I could force these people to stop cramming more and more events into their ever diminishing frame of time. Perhaps I could make them see that it is more worthwhile to obtain the things worth being rather than the things they believe are worth having; perhaps I would substitute love for their easily aroused hostility. Perhaps I could even cajole them into believing that equanimity is more to be desired than status enhancement."

What is stress, and what is a stressor? According to Dr. Guy Cochran, the stressor can be any situation, good or bad, such as a job promotion, an examination to be taken or a car that won't start, a broken romance, a near auto collision, impending surgery, flunking an exam, or any kind of emergencies. We are all subjected to these stress-producing events. It is how we react to them that is important. Events which cause stress for one person may not affect another at all. Certain individuals appear to be born with an innate capacity to cope with life's harshest blows and emerge the stronger for it. Others crumble in the face of minor adversity.

Additionally, the same individual reacts differently to a given stressor under certain conditions of his life. In other words, when he is tired, things look out of proportion to him as opposed to the way they look when he is rested and



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fresh. The fact that one individual can be affected in different ways by the same stressor, when he is under different levels of fatigue, tells us that it is important that we be aware of getting adequate rest, and of not making momentous decisions when we are fatigued or exhausted.

One important way of coping with stress is to realize the tremendous value of exercise. E.G. White states "Those whose habits are sedentary should, when the weather permits, exercise in the open air every day, summer and winter." The same author, in the book *Ministry of Healing*, states that "walking is a very preferable means of exercise." In the lifestyle of very many people today is noted a gross lack of exercise and a great overstimulation of emotions. Underexercising is directly related to such disuse diseases as overweight, coronary heart disease, stroke, peptic ulcer, and muscular weaknesses. It is also interrelated with such emotional diseases as anxiety, depression, neurosis and maladjustment. Man, as we find him today, is overrested, overfed, overstimulated, overprotected, underexercised, underreleased, and underdisciplined.

Of those events that are the most stressful in life today are, first of all, personal loss - the death of a loved one, loss of friends, or separation and divorce. High on the list of stress-producing stressors are job changes, troubles at work, and constant pressure on the job. The air traffic controller who knows that a moment of distraction may mean death to hundreds of people is a prime example. Money problems, budget problems, large debts, loss of income, family changes, changes in home caused by pregnancy, family responsibilities, followed by injury and illnesses, retirement and forced leisure, reduced income, rejection, loneliness, boredom, inactivity, pain, guilt, fear, doubt, indecision, and anxiety.

The Effects of Stress

Have you ever been on a camping trip, back in the wilderness area, and come face to face with a mother bear and her cubs? Or worse yet, have you ever had a bear maraud your camp at night and rob your food supply? If you have, you know a little about alarm reaction: fright, flight or fight. Immediately when you face this bear, your blood pressure goes up. The heart beats faster. One breathes more rapidly. Sugar increases in the blood. Cholesterol rises. Muscles tense up and every body function one does not have to use is shut off. The juices in the stomach and intestines stop flowing. The digestive process shuts down. Blood flows from the skin to the vital organs. The mechanism is triggered to speed up the coagulability of the blood and to form blood clots.

When the danger is over, whether it be imagined or real, calming hormones flow in from the pituitary and the adrenals. This is the resistance phase. But if the hormonal tug of war, the alarm-resistance phases continue too long, the body reaches a stage of exhaustion, where it is no longer able to adapt.

You might ask the question, what if you face that bear every day? What if that bear is in the form of an angry, hard-to-please boss or an upset wife who is not compatible? Your body is triggering all of these adaptive mechanisms day in and day out. According to Dr. Hans Selye, a person facing such a situation runs out of adaptation energy. It was the wise man, Solomon, who gave us a real secret in developing a coping mechanism for all of this when he said, "A merry heart doeth doeth good like a medicine." (Proverbs 17:22) Again in Proverbs 23:7, "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Is it possible to change this situation, reduce the stressors and get stress out of one's life? Not entirely perhaps, but there are ways of coping. One of these ways is exercise. How about adding to that proper diet? And rest and relaxation. Rest and relaxation are necessary, not only for treating disease but for maintaining a healthy body. Learn to consciously reduce emotional and physical tension by relaxing muscle groups. Most people do not know that they have muscle tension. They wonder why that headache seems to be plaguing them at the base of the brain.

Another coping mechanism is to get adequate sleep. Keep your sleeping room dark and be sure it gets adequate fresh air. Get mild exercise before retiring ... a 15-minute leisurely walk. Do you have trouble sleeping? Sometimes a warm drink before retiring will soothe the nerves and help sleep to come more quickly. Deep breathing will also help. Shallow breathing decreases oxygen intake, producing a condition to which nerve function is especially sensitive. Practice deep abdominal breathing exercises for calming nerves and inducing sleep. Some have found that warm and cool showers, warm footbaths and neutral tub baths to relax at night will induce sleep. Use these measures instead of drugs.

Since most stresses facing us may not be avoided, a key thing to do is to develop a correct attitude toward stress. What do you do if you feel rejected? Show acceptance. Lonely? Give of yourself to others. The Bible says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

Living is giving,
Giving is living.
All things would die,
If only receiving.

But what do you do about fear and guilt? The World Health Organization defines health as "the optimal physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." A Christian includes the spiritual dimension for complete health. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose to break the relationship with God (Genesis 3:9,10). They said "no" to God. Immediately, they experienced guilt and fear as a natural result of sin. The symptoms, as God sees them, are anger, immorality, bitterness, guilt, fear, alienation. But God is not interested in treating the symptoms. He would rather get to the heart of the disease. It is impossible to have peace of mind as long as there are guilt, anxieties, and worry. In Scripture we are told in Psalm 119:165, "Great peace have they that love Thy Law. Nothing shall offend them, nothing shall give them guilt, nothing shall give them fear and anxiety and worry."

HOW TO COPE WITH STRESS

1. List four diseases that are recognized to be related to stress.

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

2. Of the eight self-examination questions asked by the Menninger Foundation, list the four which apply most directly to you.

3. List the types of personalities according to Doctors Friedman & Roseman.

4. Dr. Friedman suggests four ways how one might modify type A behavior. List three of these ways.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

5. Dr. Friedman suggests three things that we can do physically to avoid stress. These are physical coping mechanisms. List them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

6. Give the name and author of the book where the reference is found "those whose habits are sedentary should, when weather permits exercise in the open air summer and winter."

7. Complete this sentence: "As a man thinketh in his heart _____"

8. According to David, in his Psalm 119, what is his source of great peace? _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

Phone _____