

Managing Stress

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Department of Health and
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*Center for Wellness
Without Borders*

Stress

- Definition:
 - State of tension that arises when you experience demands from your environment or from inside yourself

Can be a real **OR** perceived threat



OR



Stress Happens!!

•Stress is a normal part of life,
especially during changes in life:

- Childhood
- Adolescence
- Young adult
- Marriage
- Parenthood
- middle age
- aging
- Injury
- Moving
- Death of a loved one
- Divorce
- Retirement
- Pregnancy
- Beginning or ending formal schooling

To test the stress in you life due to life events go to:

<http://www.stresstoughness.com/lifeevents.htm>

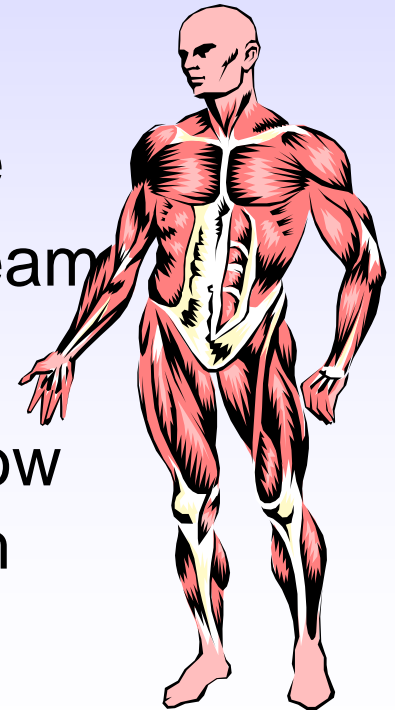
Our Body's Design

- Our bodies are uniquely designed to handle stress.
- When presented with a threatening situation it is our most basic survival instinct to either:
 - Engage in a fight
 - Or run for our lives
- This is what is known as the “fight or flight” response




During Fight or Flight

- Adrenaline is secreted from the kidneys
- Cortisol (a hormone) is released providing bursts of energy
- The heart suddenly beats faster
- Breathe rate and blood pressure increase
- Blood sugar is released into the bloodstream
- Hearing and sight are enhanced
- Digestive system and urine production slow to divert blood to more critical areas, such as the brain and muscles



It makes us able to fight or run, **BUT...**

- It is rarely necessary AND...
- Has some side effects that deteriorate our health
 - increased blood pressure 
 - Decreased immune function
 - Several important functions of the body are interrupted

Over time this can result in:

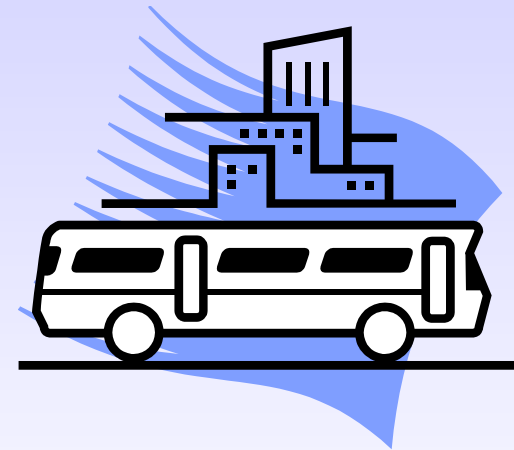
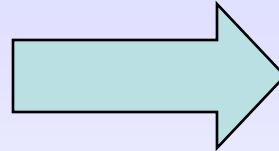
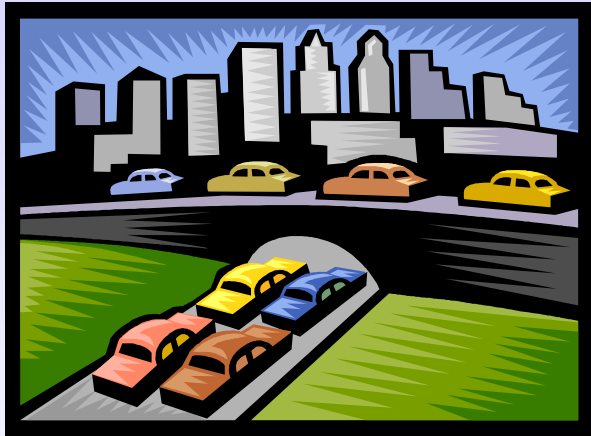
- Headaches
- Asthma
- Hypertension
- Ulcers
- Low back pain
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Upper respiratory infections
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Drug abuse
- Mental illness
- Higher risk for suicide
- Addictive disorder

What can we do to prevent this?

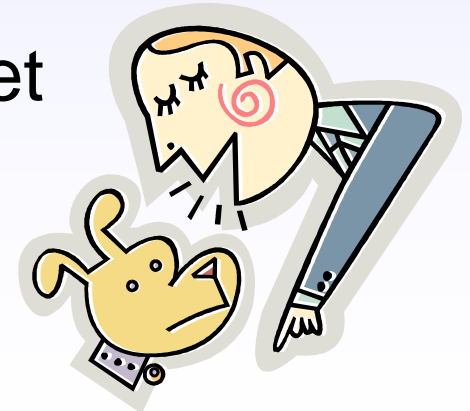
- **Fix the fixable**
- **Accept the inevitable**
- **Protect yourself from the physical affects**

Some stressors can be avoided?

- If traffic stresses you out, take the bus



- If you get anxious about your carpet being stained, install tile flooring



Many stressors can be avoided.

- When you think about stress as something that can effect your health, it may encourage you to take drastic measures
- Many are questioning whether “having it all” is worth the effort
 - Changing jobs
 - Spending the holidays with only the immediate family
 - BUT...every decision has consequences which in turn may cause more stress

Could you simplify your life?

You can't avoid life

- **Life is filled with unpredictable ups and downs that will inevitably promote stress**
 - One suggestion is to change your interpretation of the situation for example.
 - Consider the following scenario:
 - You are driving on a busy highway and Someone cuts right in front of you then slows down
 - How do you interpret this situation??





Response??



If you said:

– *“I would probably Yell, ‘IDIOT!’ at the top of my lungs.”*

OR

– *“I would be irritated and likely have negative thoughts about the driver.”*

Then you have just initiated the “Flight or Flight” response.

– Your heart is beating faster, sugar is filling your veins and in the next several hours your immune system will function a little less efficiently

Positive Interpretation??

If you said:

– *“That person must not have been paying attention, we all make mistakes.”*

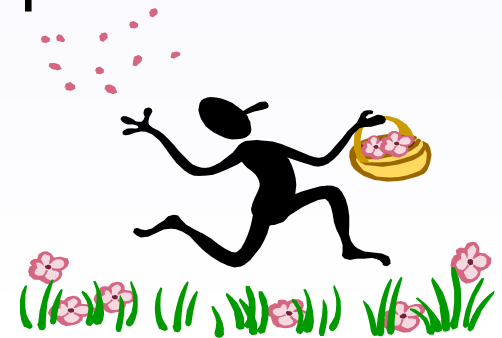
Or

– *“I’ll be glad when I can pass, but it is no big deal.”*

Or

– *“I am glad that I am not in a hurry.”*

Then you are stopping the stress response before it even starts

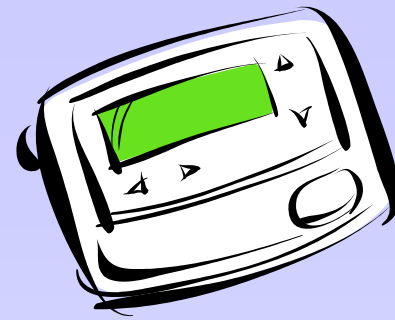


To stay positive it may help to:

Consider that we are all human and flawed

- Try to think of adults as children who happened to be grown up. We are less likely to judge and feel angry when a child makes a mistake..Why?
- Consider that it is possible that you do not have all the information to make a decision about the person or situation.
- For example...

More information



- What if you found out that the person who cut you off in traffic was rushing to the hospital to visit his mother. And he just received a beep on his pager with the message “911.” It is possible that his mother had just passed away. He was slowing down because he was distracted by the news.
- How does this change your interpretation?

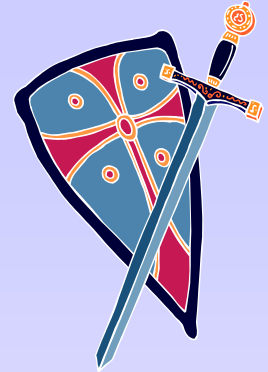
Also

- Tell yourself that it may not be a bad thing that this bad thing is happening right now.
 - At the very least you can learn something from the experience that can help you or others
 - This situation may have prevented you or someone else from having to deal with one that was even worse
 - Example: You will never know how many people who have cut you off may have saved you from being in a life-threatening collision.

Another way to “accept the inevitable”

- Stress inoculation or preparing yourself for potentially stressful events ahead of time.
- Example:
 - If you know you have to face the boss with information that may cause a conflict, you may practice sharing this information with a spouse, with friends, or even in front of a video camera.
- This can reduce or even eliminate the stress response from the actual event.

Protect Yourself



- Whether it is a stressor that you can change or one you cannot it is imperative that you practice techniques that prevent the stress response from taking over your body.
- Several techniques can be used to decrease your bodies response to stress

Exercise

Exercise boosts endorphins
which in turn can

- Put us in a better mood
- Give us more energy
- Reduces anger
- Improves mental alertness



Deep Breathing

- Breathe in deeply and slowly.
- Focus on the air moving in your nose, down your neck into your chest and feel your belly push out. Hold your breath for a few seconds.
- Now exhale slowly. First feel your belly contract in towards your spine, then feel the air move through the chest, up the neck, and through your mouth.
- Visualize stress leaving your body

Meditation

- Close your eyes and mentally follow the air in and out of your body. As you exhale mentally repeat a soothing word like “Peace”

Or

- Visualize a peaceful scene
- Do this for 5 to 30 minutes



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- While sitting or lying down, tense the muscles of your feet (curling your toes) as hard as you can.
- Then relax them.
- Do this once or twice for each part of the body
- Continue this process for each muscle group all the way up your body until you reach your head.
- When finished remain relaxed for a few minutes

Stretching

- Several stretches can be done at your desk
 - Tilt head to the left and hold
 - Tilt head to right and hold
 - Reach arms over the head and interlace fingers
- and interlace fingers



For information of stretches that can be done at your desk or for the head and neck click on the stretching girl

Get a Massage from yourself or from a professional

Self-Massage

- Sit with your shoulders relaxed
- Use your right hand to massage you left shoulder and neck, working your way up to the scalp
- Repeat with left hand for right shoulder



Laugh!!



- Find ways to add laughter in your life
 - Buy tapes of comedians you like and listen to them during your commute or whenever you need a boost.
 - Read joke books or funny books
 - Watch your favorite comedy on television
 - Buy movies that are sure to make you laugh
 - Don't take yourself too seriously