



Don't Let Stress Take over Your Life

The increasing amount of negative stress in today's fast-paced lifestyle is contributing to growing rates of depression, anxiety, workplace conflicts and substance abuse. Stress can also lead to hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. Long-term stress can also result in impaired immune system resistance to viral-linked disorders ranging from the common cold to cancer.

So it's important to recognize when your stress levels are reaching a critical point and find ways to manage that stress - before it starts affecting your health, your career and your personal relationships.

How do you tell when you're stressed out?

Physical

- Muscular tension • Headaches • Insomnia • Fatigue • Backache • Neck aches • Upset stomach • Grinding teeth
- Changes in eating/sleeping habits

Emotional

- Irritability • Anxiety • Frustration • Depression • Worrying • Nervousness • Moodiness • Anger • Self-doubt • Resentment

Mental

- Low concentration • Forgetfulness • Lethargy • Pessimism • Low productivity • Confusion

Social

- Loneliness • Nagging • Less social contact • Shouting at others • Isolation • Reduced sex drive



People cope with stress in two ways - in a healthy manner that reduces or eliminates the effects of stress, or in a negative way that only exacerbates the underlying problems. Negative coping includes compulsive and/or impulsive behaviour, which can encompass over indulgence in alcohol, work, prescription and non-prescription drugs, food, nicotine, shopping, sex and gambling. Regularly bingeing on chocolate chip cookies or medicating yourself with a few martinis may bring temporary relief, but your problems still exist, your stress symptoms return and you've complicated things by putting your physical health at risk. It's important to learn healthy ways to manage stress. This involves identifying your particular stresses, becoming more aware of your body's stress signals and using stress management techniques as soon as those signals begin to appear. You can't stop what life throws at you, but you can change the way you respond to those challenges.



Tips to coping with negative stress:

- **Exercise.** Physical activity is the best stress remedy there is. It's often been said that healthy physical exertion can "clear your head" and allow you to view an issue or make a decision in a clearer light. That being said, it's important to make sure you review any exercise program with your doctor before incorporating it into your life - particularly if you haven't exercised for a while.
- **Get enough sleep.** If you have trouble sleeping, try the following strategies: exercise during the day but not immediately before bedtime; don't drink alcohol or caffeinated beverages in the evening; take a warm bath before going to bed and try to get to sleep at the same time every night.
- **Watch what you eat.** Alcohol, caffeine, sugar and fats all put a strain on your body's ability to cope with stress. A balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and foods high in protein but low in fat will help.
- **Take care of problems as they arise.** Meeting a concern head on is less stressful than procrastinating and allowing the problem to fester.
- **Practice time management.** Prioritize and tackle one thing at a time - placing the emphasis on completing tasks that accomplish the most. **Breathe.** Proper breathing techniques can help focus the mind and calm the body. **Relax!** Read a book, go to a movie or listen to music. Make time to soothe your soul. Indulge in a massage. A massage can improve blood circulation and lower blood pressure, reduce fatigue, improve the quality of sleep, increase your sense of well-being and elevate mood.
- **Discuss your problems.** Talk to friends, a counsellor, support group or trusted relatives about what's bothering you. Have fun. Many of us get so caught up in work and home responsibilities that we forget that fun is part of life too.
- Do something you enjoy, whether it's gardening or sports, a hobby or hanging out with friends.
- **STOP TRYING TO BE PERFECT!**

Me, myself and I

Most of us have negative thoughts about ourselves and our lives from time to time, but for someone experiencing great stress, these thoughts may become so pervasive as to undermine their self-esteem, making them feel inadequate and unable to deal with problems.

Good self-esteem is a very important aspect of well-being. A person with healthy self-esteem is confident, happy and highly motivated. These attributes are the recipe for success in all aspects of life. What exactly is self-esteem? It's the opinion you have of yourself and how capable you are of coping with perceived threats. If someone has low self-esteem, they are more likely to perceive actual or imagined events in their lives in a negative light, which only serves to increase stress levels. A healthy sense of self-esteem is based on the ability to assess oneself accurately while still being able to accept and value oneself unconditionally. Healthy self-esteem is also about being able to realistically acknowledge strengths and limitations (which is part of being human) and at the same time accepting oneself as worthy and worthwhile without conditions or reservations.

Self-esteem can be improved by doing three things: forgetting, forgiving and accepting. This means letting go of past failures and not beating yourself up for your perceived inadequacies. Instead, concentrate on the strengths and virtues you possess, and start treating yourself as your friends treat you



- with kindness, tolerance and love. When you treat yourself as a valuable, worthy individual who deserves to feel good and be nurtured, you'll slowly come to feel the same way.

Did you Know?

- 75% to 90% of all doctors visits are due to stress-related ailments and stress related disorders.
- Tranquilizers, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety medications account for one fourth of all prescriptions written.
- Mental illness and addiction problems cost the Canadian economy \$33 billion last year in lost productivity.
- 40% of job turnover is due to job stress.
- 1.4 million working Canadians suffer from depression.

Bouncing Back

Being able to cope with whatever life throws your way requires resilience. It's a quality most of us have to some extent, but some people seem to bounce back from setbacks with greater ease. These highly resilient people thrive in conditions of constant change. They're flexible, sociable, creative and learn from experience. When hit by major setbacks they don't complain about life being unfair - they manage to land on their feet and often end up stronger than ever.

Strengthening and developing your resilience will make any adversity easier to cope with and, as a result, become less stressful. Highly resilient people all possess certain qualities. By developing these same qualities, your resilience will increase and your stress levels will decrease.

Let your childlike curiosity come out to play.
Wonder about things, experiment, make mistakes, get hurt and laugh.

Learn from experience. Assimilate new or unexpected experiences and be changed by them. Ask "What is the lesson here?"

Have good self-esteem.
Your self-esteem determines how much you learn after something goes wrong and allows you to accept constructive criticism... It allows you to receive praise and compliments and acts as a buffer against hurtful statements.

Have self-confidence.
Self confidence lets you take risks without waiting for approval or reassurance from others. Know and rely on your strengths.

Have good friendships and loving relationships.
Research shows that people are more resistant to stress and are less likely to get sick when they have a loving family and/or good friendships. Talking with friends and family diminishes the impact of adversity and increases feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

Have empathy.
See things through the perspectives of others, even antagonists.

Learn from life's lessons.
Learning lessons in the "school of life" is the antidote to feeling victimized. Resilient people convert what they learn from emotionally stressful situations and apply these lessons into their day-to-day lives.