Stressed? Tips to Help You Decompress!

What happens to your body when you feel stressed?

Stress brings on the "Fight or Flight Response"; your body's automatic, inborn reaction to "fight" or "flee" from a perceived attack or harm. This causes a release of stress hormones: adrenaline and cortisol that increase respiration, divert blood from the gastrointestinal tract (GI) to your muscles and limbs, dilate pupils and intensify awareness.

This physical state is meant to be temporary. If stress hormones are not used by physical activity, they can accumulate and cause mental and physical illness.

When you don't need to fight and you can't flee...

Research suggests the long term effects of excessive stress are: decreased immune function (susceptibility to infection, rheumatoid arthritis and lupus), chronic fatigue, depression, head and muscle aches, high blood pressure, heart disease and GI disorders such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

Here are some healthy strategies to cope with stress.

- Physical activity: One of the best ways to alleviate stress is to get some physical activity. Even 5 minutes will yield some relief, though longer (30 minutes) is better. In addition, aerobic exercise strengthens your heart. Examples of aerobic exercises are brisk walking, swimming, dancing and bicycling. Yoga, Tai Chi or other stretching exercises help to relieve tension in your muscles. Engage in different types of physical activities regularly to improve health and release tension.

- Breathing: Deep breathing calms your mind. Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to breathe deeply and fully with soft music. Practice in any position but it's best to lie on your back with knees bent. You may also practice breathing deeply throughout the day to relieve muscle stiffness.

- Writing: Writing about your stress can bring relief. Spend a few minutes to write about the stressful situation in your journal.

- Talking: Talk with someone and express your emotions in a positive way. You will relieve your feelings and cope better.

- Laughing and crying: These are natural ways of dealing with stressful situations to relieve tension and let go. Rent your favorite comedy or drama.

- Find favorite activities to do: List your favorite activities (positive, creative or constructive) and choose one or two activities to do whenever you are stressed. The list can include reading, gardening, sewing, dancing, watching a good movie, drawing, exercising, playing with pets, writing, or crafting.

- Avoid negative activities: Examples include binge eating, smoking, staying inactive (watching too much TV), using illegal drugs, binge drinking, and criticizing or blaming others and yourself. These negative activities will worsen the situation and add more stress.

- Be positive always: Negative thoughts never relieve stress.

- Massage: This is a popular way to relax. It involves applying pressure to different parts of your body. Massage releases anxiety, improves circulation and relieves pressure on nerves.

- Meditation: It involves sitting and breathing slowly for 15 to 20 minutes. Focus on feeling calm and having a clear awareness about life.

- Imagery: This technique uses imagination of pleasant sounds, smells, sights, feelings, and colors to relax and release tension. Take a 5 to 10 minute mini vacation to enjoy and relax.

Treat yourself to life's simple pleasures.

If you feel overwhelmed, take some time to enjoy some of the simple pleasures life has to offer:

- Say something nice to someone.
- Take a bubble bath or a warm shower.
- Stand up and stretch.
- Pet a cat or a dog.
- Call a friend.
- Read a good book.
- Go to bed early.
- Take a walk.
- Plant some flowers.
- Fix yourself a good meal and eat by candlelight.
- Watch a favorite movie with a bowl of popcorn.
- Watch the sunrise or sunset.

If you need more information:

- Talk to your health care professionals.
- Call the American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721 or visit www.americanheart.org.
- Call the American Stroke Association at 1-800-478-7653 or visit www.strokeassociation.org.
- Visit www.nih.gov/health.

Wellness & You! is a nutritional and educational program designed to provide ongoing health and wellness information as well as a variety of healthy food choices. The Wellness & You! program takes a fresh approach to offering the educational information you are looking for to make healthy dining decisions.

We have a strong commitment to offering balance and variety in the food we offer. The Wellness & You! nutrition criteria meet the dietary guidelines of most health organizations in North America including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, The American Dietetic Association and the American Heart Association.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans

- Consume a variety of foods within and among the basic food groups while staying within energy needs.
- Control calorie intake to manage body weight.
- Be physically active every day.
- Increase daily intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nonfat or low-fat milk and dairy products.
- Choose fats wisely for good health.
- Choose carbohydrates wisely for good health.
- Choose and prepare foods with minimal salt.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.
- Keep food safe to eat.

sodexo

wellness & you! by sodexo

Stressed?

Tips to Help You Decompress

Feeding your body, mind, and spirit