

Stress Management

OBJECTIVES

After studying this section, you should be able to:

- Explain the causes of stress.
- Describe how stress can be helpful.
- Explain how to recognize stress.
- Describe ways to keep stress from occurring.
- Summarize actions to take in response to stress.

TERMS TO LEARN

stress
stress management
epinephrine

What happens if you leave a teapot full of water on the range to warm? As the heat increases, the pressure inside the teapot rises. Left unattended, the water boils over. People are like the teapot. Pressure can build up inside until they "boil over." The cause isn't heat. It's

stress—physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension.

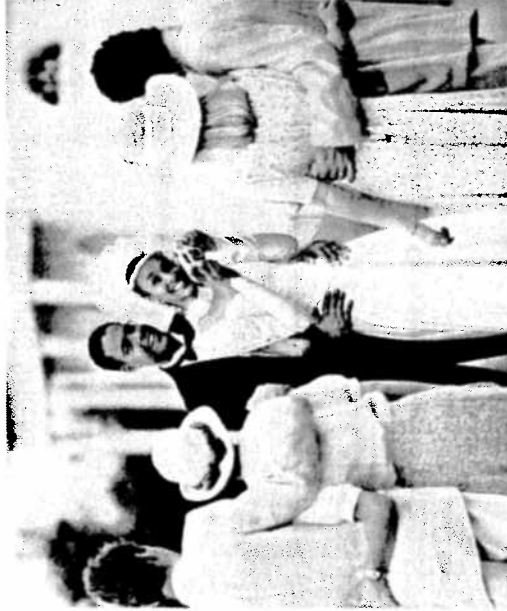
To keep a teapot from boiling over, you turn down the heat, let some steam escape, or remove the pot from the burner. Likewise, people must act to prevent stress from becoming a problem in their lives.

CAUSES OF STRESS

Many everyday situations cause stress. Being late, misplacing a textbook, and getting caught in traffic can be stressful. Crowds and noise bother some people. Difficult working conditions and strained relationships with friends or family cause stress to build.

Even pleasing events can be stressful. Would accepting an award before an audience make you tense? What about playing a sport?

Troublesome events cause significant stress in people's lives. The situations described in this unit are typically accompanied by highly stressful feelings.



Even happy events such as a wedding can bring stress to a family. What stresses might you feel when an older sibling gets married?

Personal Reactions to Stress

Everyone feels stress. That's just normal. Not everyone feels stress in the same ways, however. When you take a test, for instance, the tension you feel is different from what other classmates feel. Why is test taking more stressful to some than others?

The amount of stress you feel is partly determined by personality. Terri likes change. She looks forward to new experiences and to learning new skills. Change is less stressful to her than it is to Luke, who prefers the familiar and the routine.

On the other hand, Luke is patient. He doesn't get upset about waiting in line or for appointments. Terri is more impatient, wanting things to happen quickly. How do you think impatience affects Terri's stress level?

The urge to create and accomplish something is positive stress. Some people need a little push. Those who say they work best under pressure are acknowledging that stress motivates them.

STRESS OVERLOAD

Even though winding up a toy makes it go, if you wind too much, you'll break the spring. In the same way, excessive stress can cause both physical and mental disease. The higher your stress level becomes, the more prone you are to illness.

After fifteen-year-old Mattie's parents divorced, she lived with her mother. Her father moved out of state. Mattie missed him so much that she lost interest in food and lost weight. She withdrew from friends and began to feel physically and emotionally exhausted. After Mattie found help from a counselor, she was able to recover slowly from the stress she felt.

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF STRESS

Do you long for the stress-free life? That might not be as good as it sounds. When properly handled, some stress is like the spring in a wind-up toy: it puts you in motion and keeps you going.

UNDERSTANDING STRESS MANAGEMENT

You don't need to be overwhelmed by stress. Learning to manage stress can control the negative impact on your life. You can learn techniques that will help you cope responsibly and comfortably

Focus On ...

What Stress Feels Like

Not everyone feels stress in exactly the same way. Stress strikes where you are the weakest, and your weaknesses are not the same as everyone else's. Here are some signs of stress:

- Irritable or depressed
- Pounding heart
- Rash
- Impulsive behavior
- Emotionally unstable
- Inability to make decisions
- Urge to cry or hide
- Unable to concentrate
- Weakness or dizziness
- Afraid but not sure why
- Tense
- Trembling; nervous tics
- Easily startled
- Nervous laughter
- Speech problems
- Grinding teeth
- Nail biting
- Hair pulling
- Tapping fingers and toes

stress management. Stress management rests on several principles. First, you need to recognize your own stress and its causes. Second, you need to limit stress. Third, you need to know what to do when stress is troublesome.

- Can't sleep or sleep too much
- Sweating
- Headaches
- Frequent urination
- Menstrual problems
- Neck and back pain
- Appetite loss or overeating
- Use of nicotine and drugs
- Nightmares
- Accident prone

USING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

As Nate sat waiting with legs crossed, his right foot bobbed up and down in the air. He glanced at the clock repeatedly, feeling his heart racing. He gripped the arms of the chair, raised up slightly, and then slumped back down and sighed, shaking his head in disgust. What do you think is going on with Nate?

Balancing Work & Family Life

- Lower expectations. Talk with family members and set priorities for what needs to be done.
- Post jokes, schedules, inspirational messages, and notes on a family bulletin board.
- Offer to help family members when you can.
- Choose one personal issue that causes you to fight with family members and either implement a solution or drop the issue for one week.
- Pitch in with family members to accomplish tasks quickly. Make lunches assembly-line style or clean one room together to ease the load.



THE CHALLENGE — Reducing Stress in Busy Families

Busy schedules make people rushed and impatient. When family members are working, keeping appointments, making meals, and maintaining the home, there's not much time to relax and relate. Instead of battling short tempers, take steps to reduce stress so your family can communicate without anger and frustration.

How You Can Help

For strategies to reduce the stress in your home, try these ideas:

Recognizing Stress Signals

You won't know how to deal with stress unless you identify what causes it for you. Certain signals show that you're under stress. Many of these are listed on page 258. If you pay attention to these physical and emotional cues, you can link them to the causes. Then you can take action to deal with the problem.

Limiting Stress in Your Life

If you know that lateness makes you tense and upset, what should you do? Eliminate the causes of lateness, right? The simple principle of cause and effect can be applied in order to cut down on the stress in your life. Here are two ways.

Some people try to hold stressful feelings inside. Why could this be harmful?

about. Give each incident in life no more or less weight than it deserves. Remember, too, that other people have survived worse.

While walking with his uncle, Caleb became angry when mud from the wheels of a passing car splashed on his jacket. "There are more important things to get upset about, Caleb; we can wash it," Uncle Charlie said quietly. As Caleb thought of the recent death of his aunt, he realized that Uncle Charlie spoke from experience.



Use Your Support System

Faced with a stressful situation, which would your reaction be: confide in someone or keep your worries to yourself? Stress creates feelings you need to talk about. Sharing your problems and emotions with someone who can be supportive lightens the burden. A parent or older sibling has probably been through something similar. Sometimes it takes courage to ask for advice or assistance, but the effort is worthwhile. People want to help, just as you would if someone confided in you.

Take Appropriate Actions

Carriage horses wear blinkers along their eyes to keep them from being frightened by

things they encounter. What they don't see doesn't bother them. Blinkers, however, aren't recommended for you.

When a stressful situation looms, look it squarely in the eye and take action. Research shows that taking charge lowers production of epinephrine (ep-uh-NEE-fri-n), the human hormone responsible for the physical reactions to stress.

What action you take depends on the situation. For everyday stress that is bothering you, you may be able to ease the symptoms right away. When you feel pressures, breathe deeply for a while. Try to relax by using the ideas on pages 260-261.

Taking constructive action to remedy a stressful situation may also be necessary. If you're worried about a speech you have to give, practice it well. If you're nervous about taking a driver's test, do something that will distract you before you go. If a serious problem is causing stress, turn to the problem-solving process to take action.

Did you know that crying may actually be a good way to deal with tension? Science points out that emotional tears are chemically different from those caused by such irritations as onions. Stress-related tears have more protein and often contain high levels of minerals or hormones. Crying can bring relief by ridding the body of these chemicals. People who cry to relieve anxiety seem to have fewer stress-related diseases than those who don't cry.

The myth that tears are only for females is slowly breaking down. Both males and females cry at times. As males become more in tune with their emotions, they find that occasional tears show their sensitive side as well as help release tension.

Tears are not the only emotional outlet for stress. Some people have feelings so strong that they need to release them in

All people talk to themselves, about themselves, in their mind. This "self-talk" increases stress when it's negative. Waiting her turn at bat in a softball game, Emilia thought, "I'll probably strike out again. I'll never be any good at this game." What do you think Emilia's anxiety level was like as she stepped up to the plate?

Use Positive Self-Talk

Positive but realistic "self-talk" increases confidence instead of tearing it down. Positive "self-talk" eases the moment and often leads to success. Those who master the art of positive "self-talk" can condition themselves to think in a different, more optimistic way. This is one more way to reduce stress in your life.

SECTION 12-2 REVIEW

Check Your Understanding

1. What is stress?
2. What causes stress?
3. Is eliminating stress a worthwhile goal? Why or why not?
4. What can happen if a person is overloaded with stress?
5. What principles are the basis for stress management?
6. Why is crying believed to be a good stress reliever?
7. How can "self-talk" help a person deal with stress?
8. Thinking Critically: What do you think the Scottish proverb, it's "better to bend than break," means?
9. Problem Solving: Gina's full schedule includes school and work, plus volunteer work. Since her mother's illness, all family members must take on extra tasks at home. Gina is starting to feel stress. What can she do?

Maintain Good Health

Teens who aren't fit have a harder time coping with stress. They may even create stressful situations. If you were tired, how would you react to teasing from a family member? An overreaction could lead to problems.

Low levels of energy and mental alertness signal a problem, often with fitness. Staying fit isn't really that difficult. Do you eat a balanced, nutritious diet, including breakfast? Do you get at least eight hours of sleep each night? Do you exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight? Do you stay away from drugs and tobacco

products? These are strong physical defenses against stress. As further insurance, you can get regular physical checkups to catch any problems early.

Manage Your Life Well

When you don't know what's going to happen to you, the feeling creates stress. Gaining a sense of control increases confidence and reduces stress. The good management skills you learned earlier enable you to take charge of your life. You set goals and make plans to meet them, using the resources you've identified.

As part of good management, you plan for the unexpected. Learning to change a tire, for example, makes getting a flat less trying. Saving money gives you a financial cushion in an emergency.

Managing time according to your priorities also puts you in charge. Wasting time is a stress creator, just as time pressures can be. Satisfaction, instead of stress, comes when you feel good about how your time is spent.

INFOLINK

Time Management

Review Section 9-2 for tips on time management.

Reacting to Stress

No matter what you do, some stress is inevitable in life. How can you minimize the negative effects? Several techniques are useful.

Put Events in Perspective

Have you heard of people who "make something out of nothing"? Their view makes a situation seem worse than it is. Many situations aren't worth worrying

Learning to Relax

Learning to relax makes tough times easier. When you feel stressed, try these ideas for easing the moment.

Imagine . . . that you're in a safe and beautiful place.

Make time . . . for a hobby.

Get active . . . with exercise.

Think . . . about the good things in your life.

Listen . . . to soothing music.

