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.

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.

TERMS TO LEARN
- stress
- stress management
- epinephrine

Even happy events such as a wedding can bring stress to 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 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.

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.
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
- Urges 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

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

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:

- 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.

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. When 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.

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Check Your Understanding

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Section 12.2 Review

- Does the process in your life feel
  repetitive? Why do you think so?
- What are the most important
  things to remember when
  you're trying to solve a problem?
- How do you think these things
  affect your ability to learn?
- What strategies can you use to
  improve your problem-solving
  skills?
Learning to Relax

When you feel stressed, it's important to take steps to relax. Here are some tips:

1. **Listen to Music**: Music can help calm your mind and reduce stress.
2. **Think Positive Thoughts**: Focus on positive aspects of your life.
3. **Take a Deep Breath**: Deep breathing can help lower your heart rate and reduce stress.
4. **Exercise**: Regular physical activity can improve your mood and reduce stress.
5. **Get Enough Sleep**: Lack of sleep can increase stress levels. Aim for at least 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
6. **Eat Healthy**: A balanced diet can help manage stress and improve your overall well-being.
7. **Stay Connected**: Social support is important for managing stress.

Remember, it's important to find what works best for you and to make time for activities that help you relax and feel better.