


Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

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What You'll Learn

- Why managing stress is important.
- The consequences of not managing stress.
- The benefits of reducing stress.
- The barriers preventing people from reducing their stress.
- Strategies for managing stress.

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What Exactly is Stress?

- Stress, by definition, is the inability to cope with a threat (real or imagined) to your well-being, which results in a series of responses and adaptations by your body.
- Stress can lead to poor health and even injury.



Source: How to Handle Stress at Work by the Wellness Councils of America. ©2003 Wellness Councils of America

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Stress vs. Challenge

- Unlike stress, “challenge” is an important ingredient for healthy and productive work.
- Often confused, challenge energizes people psychologically and physically. It motivates people to learn new skills and master their jobs.
- When a challenge is met, people feel relaxed and satisfied.

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Source: *Stress At Work* by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

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Stress in America Today

- With increasing time spent on the job, job stress is becoming a painful reality for many workers.
 - 40% of workers reported that their job was very often extremely stressful.
 - 25% view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.
 - 75% of employees believe that they have more on-the-job stress than the generation before them.
 - 26% of workers said they were, “often or very often burned out or stressed by their work.”

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Source: *Stress At Work* by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

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Stress in America Today

- More than one-third of workers say their jobs are harming their physical or emotional health.
 - 42% of workers say job pressures are interfering with family and personal relationships.
 - 50% of workers say they have a more demanding workload this year than last year.



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Source: *Attitudes in the American Workplace VII* by The Marlin Company

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So Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Chronic stress may be the ultimate risk factor.
 - Some experts think stress is a major cause of 50% of all disease.
- Research indicates that stress has a dramatic effect on your immune system.

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Source: Coping with Stress by the Wellness Councils of America and Stress and Disease: New Perspectives by Harrison White, PhD

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So Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Stress has been linked to the nation's two leading causes of illness—heart disease and cancer.
 - Heart disease
 - Research over the past decade has documented that mental stress is as potent a trigger of heart disease as strenuous exercise or overexertion.
 - Cancer
 - Although not conclusive, some studies have indicated an increased incidence of early death, including cancer death, among people who have experienced major life stress factors.

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Source: Probing the Factors behind Heart Attacks by Beth Azar, PhD and Psychological Stress and Cancer by the National Cancer Institute

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So Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Stress has also been linked to a number of other conditions including:
 - Lung ailments
 - Accidents
 - Cirrhosis of the liver
 - Suicide
 - Migraine headaches
 - Digestive problems
 - Mental illness
 - Sleeping problems
 - High blood pressure
 - Asthma
 - Allergies
 - Ulcers
 - Tooth decay
 - The common cold

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Source: Coping with Stress by the Wellness Councils of America and Corporate Stress Solutions: Stress Statistics by Stress Direction

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The Good News...

- Here's the good news—life doesn't have to be as stressful for you. Just as having a high level of stress leads to negative health and life consequences, managing and reducing stress brings some important health benefits.

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The Benefits of Stress Management

- By employing strategies to help you manage stress, you'll be taking big steps in improving your health and overall quality of life.
- Managing stress will help...
 - Improve how your immune system functions.
 - Prevent illnesses like the common cold, or physical complaints such as back aches.
 - Increase your energy level, allowing you to spend more quality time with friends and family.

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The Benefits of Stress Management

- Managing your stress also...
 - Improves the quality of your sleep; allowing you to wake up well-rested and ready to go.
 - Improves your digestion.
 - Keeps you calm when the going gets tuff.
 - Allows you to be on your game—more focused, more positive.



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Why Are People Stressed Out?

- In the midst of 50-hour workweeks and an increased workload, managing stress is no small task. Understanding the most common barriers to managing stress, however, can go a long way in turning down the pressure.

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Barriers to Managing Stress

1. "I just 'deal' with my stress, it's not a big issue."
2. "It's just stress, I don't need counseling"
3. "Stress is just a part of my job."
4. "I don't have time to deal with my stress."
5. "I thrive on stress."

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Barriers to Managing Stress

6. "People who are stressed just can't cope with reality."
7. "If I just make it through these next few weeks I'll be OK."
8. "I'm so stressed, I don't even know where to start."
9. "Dealing with my stress would just be too expensive."
10. "I'm always stressed, it hasn't made a difference so far."

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Making Stress Management a Priority

- In order to make stress management a priority, it's important to understand the process of how people change. When changing behaviors, like those associated with reducing stress, most people go through a cycle known as the "Stages of Change."

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The Five Stages of Change

- Stage 1:** Nope...Not interested in dealing with my stress right now.
- Stage 2:** Hmm...I'm seriously considering stress management.
- Stage 3:** Yep...I'm getting ready to start dealing with stress.
- Stage 4:** Let's go...I'm managing my stress.
- Stage 5:** Old news...I've been able to cope with my stress for a long time.

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Not Interested in Changing Now

- People in this group have no intention of dealing with their stress, and frankly may not even see stress as something they should address.

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Serious Consideration

- These people understand that finding ways to manage their stress would be good for them, but they aren't making concrete plans to manage their stress.

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Getting Ready To Change...Soon

- These individuals understand the benefits of stress management, and are looking at employing stress management techniques in the very near future.

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Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

- People in this stage have started to find ways to manage their stress. They're actually incorporating stress management strategies as part of their daily routines.

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Old News...Been There, Done That

- These people are successfully managing the stress in their lives. The new strategies they're using to deal with and address stress have become a normal behavior for them.



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What Stage Are You In?

- Determining what stage you're in is an important first step in learning to manage stress. Once you know where you're at, you'll be better equipped to cope with whatever life throws at you.

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Determining Your Stage: Self Quiz

To find out what stage you're in, pick the statement that most accurately describes you:

- I'm currently stressed, and I don't intend to find ways of coping within the next six months.
- I'm currently stressed, but I'm thinking about dealing with it in the next six months.
- I'm currently stressed, but have, on and off, tried to gain some control over it.
- I've managed to reduce my stress within the last six months.
- I've been successfully managing my stress for more than six months now.

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Determining Your Stage

Each of the following statements corresponds to a stage in the change process.

If you checked:

- I'm currently stressed, and I don't intend to find ways of coping within the next six months—you're in **stage one**.
- I'm currently stressed, but I'm thinking about dealing with it in the next six months—you're in **stage two**.
- I'm currently stressed, but have, on and off, tried to gain some control over it—you're in **stage three**.
- I've managed to reduce my stress within the last six months—you're in **stage four**.
- I've been successfully managing my stress for more than six months now—you're in **stage five**.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 1

Not Interested in Changing Now

- Read, *Coping With Stress*.
- Create a list of reasons why managing your stress will benefit you.
- Create a list of why managing your stress will benefit your family.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 1

Not Interested in Changing Now

- Watch the movie, *Falling Down*.
- Make a list of the people pressuring you to better manage your stress.
- Write about two situations in the last year where you defended your inability to deal with stress.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 2

I'm Giving Change Serious Consideration

- Read, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Ken Blanchard.
- Describe how your stress makes you feel emotionally.
- Write down your five biggest stressors.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 2

I'm Giving Change Serious Consideration

- Speak with a friend who's experiencing negative health effects as a result of high stress.
- At least one time per day, make sure to spend 15 minutes doing something you find relaxing (reading, talking with friends, etc.).
- Take a stress self-assessment.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 3

Getting Ready to Change Soon

- If available, meet with an EAP counselor at your place of work.
- Create a written plan to incorporate a moderate amount of physical activity into your routine to help you deal with stress.
- Tell your friends and family about your plans to reduce your stress level.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 3

Getting Ready to Change Soon

- Find a friend who will help you manage your stress. Make sure to develop a plan on how this relationship will function.
- Mark a date on the calendar when you will begin a new, less stressed way of life.
- Purchase relaxation CD's and videos to use at home and in the car.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 4

Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

- Enroll in a stress management class to help you achieve your goals.
- Regularly update your friends and family on your efforts to reduce stress.
- Begin a regular walking program to help you reduce stress.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 4

Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

- Create a list of responses that you can use as substitutes to getting stressed out
- Take on a new activity like golfing, joining a walking club, or bicycling.
- Learn and utilize a stress management technique like yoga or meditation.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 5

Old News...Been There, Done That

- Celebrate accomplishing your written stress management plan.
- Continue to develop healthy habits in your life beyond exercise and stress management.
- Offer yourself as a testimonial to others about the benefits of stress management.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 5

Old News...Been There, Done That

- Create a list of all the benefits you've been experiencing since beginning to manage your stress—be sure to review previous lists and write down how things have changed.
- Identify what has been the most helpful resource on your road to managing stress and incorporate more of it into your life (i.e., books, relaxation CD's, etc.).

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Key Point: Change is a Process

- Pay attention to all of these change strategies no matter which stage you're in. Because learning to manage stress is a process, chances are you'll find yourself in each stage at some point in the process.



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General Tips for Managing Stress

- Regular exercise is a great way to reduce the effects of stress.
- Lead a healthy lifestyle—proper nutrition makes a big difference.
- Take one thing at a time.
- Go easy with criticism.
- Be realistic in what you *can* accomplish compared to what you *want* to accomplish.
- Shed the “superman/superwoman” urge—realize that no one’s perfect, you will make mistakes.

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