

What is stress? Stress is nothing else but your body's response to mental or emotional pressure. Some stress may be good as it can make one perform better to overcome the situation or situations that are causing it. When we are not able to manage stress and let it get the better of us then it becomes a problem and now have to find ways of managing, otherwise it takes us down or puts us in a worse situation, say depression. When stress overwhelms us it will damage our relationships, our moods and as mentioned earlier, have a very negative impact on our health. So how do we manage it? How do we not let it affect us?

What happens to our bodies when we are stressed?

The effects of stress on our bodies are immense. The following are examples of what can be affected by not properly managing stress.

1. Immune system – if we are under prolonged stress, our immune system can be compromised making us susceptible to frequent infections. Even viral illnesses like the common cold and flu will be prevalent.
2. Musculoskeletal system – stress affects our muscles. They tense up when we are stressed. This is the body's way of guarding itself against injury. With taut muscles, tension-type headaches are very common.
3. Respiratory system – the heart beats faster when one is under stress. This in effect can trigger other conditions like asthma or panic attacks.
4. Cardiovascular system – continued levels of high stress can have adverse effects on the heart and the other organs related to it. These could lead to problems with blood pressure, having adverse effects on other organs of the body.

Unhealthy ways to deal with stress

Some unhealthy ways to manage stress include taking alcohol with the hope of drowning your sorrows. Taking alcohol is not a coping mechanism. It only depresses you further once the alcohol wears off. Another unhealthy way is taking drugs or smoking. Substance abuse if not checked can put one into even bigger problems. Avoid reaching for a cigarette every time something stressful happens. These ways will have adverse effects on your health. Emotional eating is also unhealthy because you will end up eating junk food. Within no time you will not have control over what you eat, adding on to problems like obesity.

Finally, a little stress in your life is not bad. Some people tend to work well under pressure but if you get to a point where you feel that everything is going downhill, drop it and take a walk. It might be the difference between falling off the cliff and hanging on.

WAYS TO DEAL WITH STRESS - A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Stress is an increasing problem in today's world, but it need not become a fact of life. Yes, there are likely to be occasions when we have many demands made on our time, several places where we need to be, problems that need to be resolved but which offer no opportunity for shortcuts. Finding ways to avoid stress before it dominates our thought processes is the key to success.

Let's look at 10 positive ways to deal with stress

1. Attitude is an important factor. When we start to feel resentful, cornered, overwhelmed it can become frustrating and debilitating. Sometimes it can help to take a moment and reflect on our position. We can turn our thinking around as we remind ourselves that we are happy that we chose to be a parent with lovely children, have enjoyed working hard to make the business successful, were really committed to earning the promotion or have chosen to organize a big wedding.
2. Taking responsibility for our choices can turn a tough situation into one that has many plus points. This can help us see the situation as less stressful and more as a matter of choice. It can change our perspective and make us feel better about our position. This realization can help us appreciate what we have. We celebrate our good fortune rather than feel stressed by the position we are in.
3. Dealing with issues as they occur helps to avoid stress. Whether it be a tough piece of work, a disagreement with a friend or colleague, or an unpleasant meeting, putting it off only makes matters worse. The situation is unlikely to heal itself. And often, once we start to deal with things we discover that they are not so difficult after all. Often anticipation is the worst part.
4. Prioritizing important matters avoids other people becoming demanding and constantly on our case. Respecting that something important needs handling immediately can help avoid being contacted by stressed people demanding to know when they will receive their information or piece of work. Leaving things till the last-minute is stressful for everyone.
5. Enjoy finding solutions to problems and treat it as an interesting opportunity to learn. Stressed people often worry about making mistakes and getting things wrong. Treating challenges as opportunities to learn and develop new skills can turn potentially stressful situations around, into positive events.
6. Taking personal time helps to keep stress levels at bay. We recharge our batteries, spend time having fun and establish a good work/life balance. Personal time provides an opportunity to switch off from

stressful situations rather than needing to remain constantly vigilant. It helps keep a balanced perspective on life.

7. Allow friends to help. by talking through worries, sharing stressful problems we obtain support from those close to us. They may listen in a sympathetic way or even be able to offer sound help and advice. Sharing a problem often enables it to become less stressful.
8. Ensure though that friends are also part of relaxation time and that not every conversation is about the day's stresses and problems. Fun needs to be part of the time spent with friends. Otherwise these relationships become an extension of the problem and every conversation is focused on the stress of finding a solution. It can become boring and tedious for everyone.
9. Taking care of ourselves is important in avoiding stress. Ensuring that we look after our food and eat healthy, are aware of the amount of alcohol we consume and why, try to maintain good sleeping patterns, exercise; these are all ways of investing our health and well-being.
10. Stress can be avoided by taking pre-emptive measures. Learning to recognize the triggers that affect us and dealing with those situations as soon as they occur helps us to retain control over our health and well-being. This is the best way to avoid stress, remain positive and have better balance in life.

Whilst some stress is good and enables us to perform well and react to situations, prolonged exposure to stress is debilitating and can affect our health.