

Lessen the Stressin'

Strategies for Becoming Smarter in Managing Stress

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Two excerpts from the book

What It Means to be Stress-Smart.....

...A range of tools and knowledge which could become part of a stress management plan has been reviewed throughout this book. Developing a stress management plan involves taking the time to evaluate all of this information and to determine what will work best for you. This activity is an integral part of being smart with stress, becoming **stress-smart**.

Being stress-smart has three elements. It begins with having knowledge about what creates stress in general and, more specifically, what produces stress for you, and how you know you are experiencing it. Being stress-smart also entails knowing how to reduce the possibility of facing stress. This can include seeking to avoid unhealthy situations, if feasible, which you know could become problematic, and staying away from stressful and non-productive encounters with others, unless necessary. In addition, the use of good communication and problem-solving skills to promote more copacetic encounters with others is a part of this effort. The third element of being stress-smart involves knowing how to respond when stressful circumstances arise, in order to minimize the impact of the stressor. The use of stress reduction tools can help to achieve this goal.

There is some time and reflection needed to be able to create a stress management plan which incorporates the elements necessary to become stress-smart. Which strategies and information you decide to use each day as part of your plan as you move forward is a personal choice. You are in the best position to determine what will be effective, and what can be discarded as you address the stressors in your life. In making this choice, you hopefully will keep an open mind for introducing new strategies which might work for you, and for removing or modifying those that don't. Given the power of stress to potentially take away from what feels good in your life, becoming stress-smart, and having a solid repertoire of personal strategies at your disposal, can serve you well...

Excerpts from Lessen the Stressin' (continued)

Having a Sense of Purpose as an Antidote for Stress.....

...What would be your response if you were asked to define what is most important to you? Coming up with specific answers to this general question, and discovering what gives you positive energy each day, even during difficult times, could be an invaluable exercise in clarifying what gives your life a **sense of purpose**. Engaging in ongoing reflection is a good first step in finding an answer. The use of mindfulness strategies can only enhance this process. This process of reflection can involve asking pointed questions about the work you have chosen, to confirm that it is fulfilling, or at a minimum has sufficient elements which bring you satisfaction. It could include reflecting on how you conduct personal business on a daily basis and assessing if these actions are in line with the person you would like to be. It might consist of evaluating your relationships with others to determine whether you are operating in a way which is in harmony with your values, and if you are making meaningful connections with others.

Understanding and being guided by what you value has a central role in creating meaning in your life and giving you a sense of purpose. Your **values** are what you consistently believe are important for directing how you conduct personal business, and for what you seek as an outcome for yourself. There can be what are referred to as *instrumental values*, or those values which guide how you achieve your goals. Such values might involve honesty, forgiveness, helpfulness, courage, open-mindedness, imagination, or politeness, as examples.

Your values can also include *terminal values*, which reflect the broad goals you seek to attain as an endpoint for your efforts. Among these values could be a sense of achievement, an active style of living, freedom, equality, self-respect, beauty, family security, or prosperity, to name just a few. It is important to recognize that your values often change as you grow and as you encounter new experiences. Recognizing your values and affirming that you are guided by them on a continual basis is at the core of creating meaning in your life.

So, what is the relevancy of the opening question for this section and chapter as it pertains to managing stress? It is that the answer can help to define a direction for moving ahead in a positive and committed way, even during periods of difficulty. Having a sense of purpose can also provide you with the motivation and energy for overcoming the challenges and stresses of daily life and for continuing on a path forward regardless of these distractions. When faced with stress, particularly with substantial or chronic stress, committing yourself to pursue a meaningful goal offers the opportunity to focus, as an alternative, on something constructive and motivating, instead of on the threats you are facing. We all gain energy, confidence, and strength knowing we can move towards achieving a goal which is rewarding and will produce

Excerpts from Lessen the Stressin' (continued)

Having a Sense of Purpose as an Antidote for Stress (continued).....

good feelings. *Sometimes this goal can be as simple as striving to be the best version of yourself.*

As part of discovering what is meaningful for you, it may be helpful to ask yourself what, in an ideal world, you would specifically like to be doing with your life in the future, assuming there would be no impediments in front of you for achieving this goal. Giving yourself the freedom to think in this way, without the limitations, may give you a more accurate picture of what is most important to you...