

Step by Step Stress Management

Several years ago, Time magazine's cover story referred to "Stress, The Epidemic of the Eighties." Since then, numerous studies have shown that the problem has become more severe. **Did you know???**

- ◆ 75-90% of visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related problems.
- ◆ Job stress is far and away the leading source of stress for adult Americans, per the World Health Organization.
- ◆ The AMA has indicated that the leading causes of death today are lifestyle-induced stress, diet, smoking, drinking, and inactivity.

Although this is frightening information, there is hope. Stress management has proven effective in improving physical and mental wellbeing and increasing resiliency to life's common stressors. Take the following steps to improve your resiliency to stress.

Step 1. Know your stressors. Work? Family? Crazy schedules? \$\$\$ issues? Car problems? Health problems?

- ◆ Identify your specific personal stressors and discern what you can and cannot control. We may not be able to control certain stressors, but we can prepare ourselves by practicing stress management.

Step 2. Know your stress symptoms. Headaches? Backaches? Tense muscles? Teeth gritting? Stomach discomfort? Sleep problems? Fatigue? Depressed? Decreased concentration?

- ◆ Become familiar with how your body and mind respond to stress. Many people simply ignore their symptoms until serious physical or mental health problems develop. (See your physician if this is the case.) If you wait until this point, managing stress may seem more difficult than it really is. Establish a stress management plan before any serious problems occur.

Step 3. Develop your stress management plan. Need some ideas?

- ◆ Regular exercise (at least three times weekly for 30 minutes each time)
- ◆ Reduce your caffeine intake
- ◆ Incorporate humor into your daily life
- ◆ Participate in at least one leisure activity weekly (Make sure it is something you enjoy so that you look forward to it. This can also be exercise!)
- ◆ Massage
- ◆ Meditation
- ◆ Decrease your stress load. Reducing social and/or work obligations and saying "no" more often are great ways to begin de-stressing ourselves.
- ◆ If you are in a period of high stress, you may want to consider postponing any major changes, as this will only create additional stress.
- ◆ Finally, surround yourself with positive, supportive people.



Now that you have some ideas, choose your technique(s) and remember that final step in stress management—**PRACTICE!** If you are experiencing difficulty managing your stress and would like professional assistance, **HelpPeople at 7447** is a great place to start.