

STRESS, ITS EFFECTS, and SKILLS TO OVERCOME

Sometimes we experience worry, stress, and nervousness when facing new challenges or the unknown. Examples might include academic tests, meeting new people, or sports. This can help prepare and motivate us to achieve our hopes. At other times, we experience more difficult situations or stress that feels unbearable. If the pressure is too high for too long it leads to physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional problems. Stress and behavioral health are affected by both environmental and biological factors. Emotional health concerns are less likely if environmental stress is well managed or reduced, we take care of our bodies, medications are taken as prescribed (if necessary), and substance use is avoided.

The good news is **WE CAN** identify if our stress is healthy or not, reduce it when needed, and develop positive ways to cope with the pressure! If you are noticing the effects below and they interfere with everyday life for what feels like too long, it is time to take action.

Potential Effects of Stress:

Physical 	Cognitive 	Behavioral 	Emotional 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortness of breath • Headaches • Stomachaches • Nausea • Sore muscles • Rapid heartbeat • Chest pain • Sweating • Dizziness • Illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor concentration • Forgetfulness • Racing thoughts • Negative thinking • Self-critical • Confusion • Distracted • Difficulty making decisions • Disorganized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procrastination • Substance use • Verbal or physical outbursts • Changes in sleep • Changes in appetite • Poor hygiene • Nightmares • Exhaustion • Withdrawal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Irritability • Sadness • Hopelessness • Anger • Impatience • Sensitivity • Low self-esteem • Moodiness • Crying

Skills to Decrease Stress:

- ❖ **Take care of yourself:** Eat healthy, exercise or play every day, spend QUALITY time with family/friends, get 8 hours or more of sleep nightly.
- ❖ **Look at expectations:** Are your expectations realistic or causing more damage than good?
- ❖ **Do not try to control things that cannot be controlled:** We can work to do our very best while recognizing and accepting what we can't control. Nothing is more stressful than trying to change what we have no control over.
- ❖ **Break down goals, tasks, and responsibilities into steps:** These duties are not as overwhelming when taking it one step at a time. Most of us were not worrying about graduating college on our first day of kindergarten!
- ❖ **Recognize your strengths:** Make a list of your strengths, talents, and positive qualities. Think of times you have overcome challenges with your strengths. Focus on what you do well and do not compare yourself to others.

- ❖ **Use Encouragement:** Cheer yourself on. Repeat to yourself over and over; “I can do this,” “It won’t last forever,” “I’m doing my best,” “I got this.”
- ❖ **Find Balance:** Work to manage time wisely, be careful not to add things that bring more stress to life, create priorities and act accordingly. Ensure you don’t feel pulled too hard in any one direction by life’s demands.
- ❖ **Some stress isn’t harmful, but seeing it as harmful is:** People who have experienced moderate amounts of stress may be more resilient to stress in the future. When faced with more stress, you have experiences to know you can get through it unharmed and possibly stronger. Too much stress at one time is not good.
- ❖ **Put boundaries on screen time/media/information:** Content of such and screen time cause stress symptoms. Screen time encourages constant comparison of self to others, cyber bullying and social inappropriateness, sensory overload, disruption of sleep, and physically triggers the body’s stress response.
- ❖ **Make meaning:** Find or make purpose, meaning, or value in tough experiences. Focus on any positive aspects of a stressful situation you can find and remember them often. Make lemonade out of lemons.
- ❖ **Change unhealthy thinking:** Notice unhealthy thoughts you have during the day and think of more healthy thoughts to replace them. Journaling such can be very helpful. Examples of unhealthy thinking include over generalizing, jumping to conclusions, not accepting the positive, and all or nothing thinking.
 - **Example:** Unhealthy thought-“I am not good enough and I am going to make a mistake”. Healthy Replacement Thought- “I am working hard and we all make mistakes at times. I can learn from them”.
- ❖ **Find time to relax with possibilities including:**
 - **Deep Breathing:** Take deep breaths in through your nose so your stomach rises, pausing for a few seconds, before slowly breathing out through your mouth. Deep breathing can counteract the physical effects of stress.
 - **Imagining a relaxing place:** Think of your favorite calming place, noticing what you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear to healthily distract and relax.
 - **Stretching:** Stretch the muscles in your body gently. Stress often causes our muscles to tighten and stretching counteracts this tension.
 - **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Gently tense the muscle groups in your body, one at a time. Then, relax that muscle group and completely relax for at least 15 seconds before moving onto the next muscle. Many people will add deep breathing and calming imagery while relaxing the muscle group. Move through your face, neck, shoulders and back, arms, hands, chest and stomach, legs, and feet one at a time. Be careful not to cause pain when tensing muscles.
 - **Do things you enjoy, laugh.**

Support and Resources:

Hey Sigmund, Where the Science of Psychology Meets the Art of Being Human:

<http://www.heysigmund.com/>

Other:

THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

If you or your child begins to have suicidal thoughts, please contact your treatment team immediately or call 911 in an immediate emergency. Effective treatment and safety planning can help you or your child overcome these challenges and find the hope to live!