

# Stress

KEYS TO RELIEF



## teach yourself how to **relax**

Stress is a normal part of life. If you feel overwhelmed by stress, you are not alone. Stress affects most people today. Each of us faces stress in different situations such as work, family, money issues, personal issues and successes. However, too much stress can have a negative effect on your mind and body.

Stress is the pressure of having too much to handle. Too much stress can lead to physical, as well as psychological symptoms. These pressures include positive life events such as getting married, buying a house, going to college, or receiving a promotion.

It is important to learn to recognize when your stress levels are out of control. The most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar – even normal.

**Call the Behavioral Health Services  
directly at 1.877.221.9295.**

Recovery can, will, and DOES happen.

### **Stress Warning Signs and Symptoms**

#### **Cognitive Symptoms**

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor judgment
- Seeing only the negative
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worry

#### **Behavioral Symptoms**

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Putting things off or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing, or grinding teeth)

#### **Physical Symptoms**

- Aches and pains
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Nausea/dizziness
- Chest pain
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dry mouth or throat
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds
- Nervous ticks

#### **Emotional Symptoms**

- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness or isolation
- Scared

**Recognizing that everyone is affected by stress, the following are a few suggestions on how to control and manage stress and reduce its impact:**

**Self Awareness** – Be aware of YOU - Be aware of your needs, values, and desires. Listen to your body.

**Budget Your Time & Energies** – What are the most important things to do today? Make a list in order of importance. Take on no more or less than you can handle. Learn to take your time.

**Operate In a Supportive Environment** – Organize your personal space so it works for you. After being around a hectic, chaotic environment, you need a quiet, private space and fill it with things that are meaningful to you.

**Sleep Well** – Lack of sleep can lessen your ability to deal with stress. Most people need 7 – 8 hours of sleep every 24 hours. If stress repeatedly prevents you from sleeping, talk to your PCP.

**Work Off Stress** – Exercise regularly and often. Dealing with stress calls for physical stamina. Exercise is a great way to release tension. It can lift your spirits, relax you and increase your energy.

Materials in this brochure were adapted from the University of Wisconsin; Norris Health Center; University of Nebraska at Omaha; "Understanding Stress," HelpGuide.com; "Stress," healthline.com; "Handling Stress in the New Millennium", everydayhealth.com

## control your **stress**

**Balance Work and Recreation** – All work and no play can make you a nervous wreck. Schedule time for recreation to relax your mind and body.

**Talk About What Troubles You** – It helps to share problems with someone you trust – a friend, family member, teacher, counselor, etc. Sometimes, another person can help you see a new side to the problem and thus a solution. You'll be surprised how sharing a problem tends to lighten the burden. Problems, kept to yourself, tend to appear much worse than when you share them with a friend.

**Strengthen Your Relationships** – A strong support network is your greatest protection against stress. Those who have close supportive relationships with others live longer, healthier, more stress-free lives. Giving and receiving love and care are basic needs for all of us.

**Don't Self-Medicating** – Relieving stress with cigarettes, alcohol, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills may help temporarily, but you may pay a high price because they will only mask it. Many are habit forming and can cause more stress than they solve.

**Change Your Way of Looking at Things** – Being positive, not negative can reduce a lot of stress. Put problems in a broader perspective. Step outside the situation and decide how important the whole thing is.

**Eat Regularly** – Don't skip meals. Your energy level will go down quickly without nutrition. Never think that you don't have time.

**Learn How to Relax** – Learn one technique that works for you. Twenty minutes of relaxation a day can be a great help to your health. It makes for better decision making, increased energy, and clearer thinking. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response.



**Find Faith** – Studies have shown that daily prayer or meditation can be a major stress reducer.

**Learn the Art of the Mini-Escape** – When pressure begins to mount too high, give yourself some breathing room and retreat. Take time out for a walk, see a movie, read a book, learn to relax, and re-energize yourself. Putting distance between you and the pressure sometimes not only relieves the stress, but provides some helpful insight into your pressure.

**Learn to Accept What You Cannot Change** – If a problem is beyond your control, try your best to accept it. Focus on things that you can do something about.

**Seek Out Professionals** – Depending on the source of your stress you may need the help of a professional. If a money matter is the source, you may want to contact a credit counselor or financial planner. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your emotions, you may want to contact a counselor or therapist.