

:: Stress ::

Stress. Many of us are faced with it every day, but we might not know how to deal with it. It is important to learn how to handle stress because it can affect our performance and relationships in our work and home. At work, stress can lead to distraction and cause an unfortunate accident. At home, stress can put a strain on family relationships.

Stress usually occurs when there are changes in our lives and we feel that we don't have enough resources to deal with those changes and demands. Which of the following do you think causes stress: getting married, winning the lottery or having an argument? It is all of them. Stress can occur not only from negative life experiences, but also from positive ones. People react and deal with stress differently, but common stress symptoms include upset stomach, fatigue, tight neck muscles, irritability and headaches. Some people react to stress by eating or drinking too much, losing sleep or smoking cigarettes. Stress may also make you more susceptible to illnesses, including the common cold, ulcers and some cancers.

The first step to managing stress is to identify your "stressors" – those things that are making you react. Stressors may not only be events that cause you to feel sad, frightened, anxious or happy. You can cause stress through your thoughts, feelings and expectations. Look at the list below. Which cause you stress? Can you think of other stressors?

- Not enough time
- Unexpected change
- Family problems
- Extra responsibility
- Personality clashes
- Money difficulties

Everyone has to deal with life's problems. A key to dealing with the big and little everyday stressors is coping with stress in a positive way.

1. Acceptance – Many of us worry about things we have no control over. For example, a family illness, a great deal of change at work or finding out that your favorite sports team lost. One way to manage stress is to accept when things are beyond your control. It may be helpful to think positive thoughts such as, "Someday I'll laugh about this," or "It's a learning experience."

2. Attitude – Try to focus on the positive side of situations. Ask yourself, "What good can come out of this?" "What can I learn from this situation?" and "How can I handle this better when it comes up again?" Solutions come easier when you focus on the positive, and your stress level will be reduced.

3. Perspective – We often worry about things that never happen. Keep things in perspective by asking yourself, "How important is this situation?" "Can I do anything about it?" "In five years, will I even remember it happened?"

Think about the situations in your life that cause you stress. Are they important or unimportant? Are they controllable or uncontrollable? If they are controllable events, you can take action to change the situation; if they are uncontrollable, you can use your skills in acceptance, attitude and perspective to reduce the stress.