

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND SELF CARE

The following techniques are useful to managing stress levels. In developing an action plan, individuals will find these vary in their appeal and in their relevance to personal situations. Try to choose those which would be useful and of interest to you.

TECHNIQUES

1. **LARGE MUSCLE ACTIVITY:** Stress prepares the body to move so take action to reduce the stress. Take a walk inside or outside, exercise, stretch, do isometric exercises, engage in smaller muscle activity such as wiggling your toes, doodling, use a handspring.
2. **USE THE DO-NUT:** Remember anger is a cover-up of painful feelings. When you're angry, rather than explode, intervene to bring the stress down and then look for the pain and hurt underneath. When someone is angry with you, remember the Do-Nut. Rather than becoming defensive and counterattacking, look for their pain and hurt, listen and empathize.
3. **TALK TO OTHERS:** Identify a family member, friend or colleague who will listen to you and understand. Talk with them. Don't just find someone who will agree with your point or collude in putting others down. This only reinforces your stress.
4. **SLOW DOWN:** Society tends to emphasize that speed equals efficiency. However, research shows accuracy and enjoyment drop with increased speed. Speed gets the goal accomplished but the cost is less enjoyment, poorer quality and increased stress. Slowing down increases performance, quality and enjoyment while reducing stress.
5. **MUSCLE RELAXATION:** Learn relaxation skills such as progressive relaxation, yoga, massage, biofeedback, meditation, self-hypnosis. Practice the skill so you'll have it available in times of stress.
6. **SEEK PLEASURABLE GOODIES:** Find out what hobbies and activities you enjoy. Engage in them, especially during stress times.

7. **CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE:** Recognize when you're catastrophizing and focusing on the negative. Try to be more positive. Check to see if you have control over the situation. If you don't, accepting the situation as it is can reduce the stress. Be more realistic in self-talk. Learn to tolerate and to forgive.
8. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:** Most of us are uncomfortable when we think of caring for ourselves, but we wouldn't think of neglecting our jobs. Thus, in times of stress we frequently forget ourselves and plunge into the job when we need self-care most. Take time for yourself -- instead of socializing on a break, spend time alone. Schedule the time -- others won't just give it.
9. **SEEK SOLITUDE:** This is especially important if the job involves considerable contact with people. Time alone to reflect, evaluate, set priorities, contemplate and fantasize is important. Take lunch alone, seek solitude early in the morning , late at night, when traveling to and from work.
10. **DO A ME-ACT:** Me-acts are mini-vacations with two requirements -- do it alone and have no specific goals. Learn to loaf, browse, play, wander. Balance me-acts with social releases.
11. **ATTEND TO HEALTH AND NUTRITION:** Get exercise, eat well. Avoid the "baddies" (tobacco, alcohol, food, caffeine, sugar, drugs)
12. **MINIMIZE COMPETITION:** Assess if you work in a competitive job. Do you compete with others? With your own high goals and standards? If you are unable to reduce the competition, try to live non-competitively in other areas in your life.
13. **IDENTIFY PERSONAL STRENGTHS:** In a time of low stress, identify your strengths. Use this list to help you through high stress. Make up a trait list. Become less dependent on others for approval or disapproval. Learn ways to change and renew yourself.
14. **RE-ASSESS CODE OF BEHAVIOR:** Decide if you're trying to be the ideal employee, friend, family member. Recognize what the ideal is and that this is probably impossible. Develop a new behavior code. Set realistic limits so you don't fear failure. Instead of trying to get along well with everyone, to never have problems or needs for others, to never be vulnerable, stressed, or angry, try to take time for yourself, to communicate, to consider the other person's viewpoint. Learn to be honest, and that you don't have to be first.
15. **DIVERSIFY INVESTMENTS:** Spread your energies to work, family, friends, hobbies. Don't put all the eggs in one basket or burn-out becomes a possibility.

ACTION PLAN

1. At work, what physical activity can I use? What kind of muscle activity do I or can I do regularly?
2. My underlying hurt feelings are? My coworkers are likely to have these underlying hurt feelings? The people I interact with are likely to have these underlying hurt feelings?
3. I should talk more with?
4. I want to slow down while doing the activity
5. I would like to learn the following realization skills?
6. Some pleasurable goodies I can use to reduce are?
7. Areas where I tend to catastrophize and the negative include? More positive ways to look at these areas?
8. Some special things I can do to take care of myself include? The times to be sure to take care of myself are?
9. When and where I can seek solitude?
10. I can do the following Me-acts (browsing, loafing, puttering, etc.)
11. I can reduce the following "baddies"? I can improve my nutrition by?
12. I want to reduce my competition -- where?
13. Positive statement list. . . Other sources of strength
14. My present code includes these expectations? A more realistic code would include these expectations. . .
15. To diversify my emotions, I will increase my emotional investment in the following areas. . .