



STRESS



Stress can be defined as a feeling of emotional or physical tension or a difficulty that causes worry. According to Medline Plus, there are a number of types of stress.

One type of stress, emotional stress, usually occurs when people consider situations to be difficult or unmanageable. When you have this type of stress, you may have a feeling of being suddenly overwhelmed by the tasks of your everyday life and feel like you are losing control.

Another type of stress, physical stress, refers to a physical reaction of the body to various situations. This kind of stress can lead to dizzy spells, anxiety, tension, sleeplessness, or nervousness. Physical stress can often lead to emotional stress, and emotional stress can often cause physical discomfort like stomach cramps. Being under frequent stress may be dangerous for a person's overall health.

Researchers believe that there is a strong link between our thoughts, attitudes, and emotions that impact our mental and physical health. While our thoughts and emotions do not directly cause a chronic condition, it can affect how our body functions. For example, thoughts and emotions can alter our heart rate, blood pressure, blood sugar levels, concentration, etc.

Please remember that everyone can react to stress in different ways. Managing those stressful situations that we might face in our lives can help in many ways. Reducing tension can help us to make positive emotional and physical changes.

ASSESSING STRESS

Let's start with a person's attitude. We often talk about whether a person sees a glass as half full or half empty and that attitude can influence whether or not any particular situation or emotion is stressful. It's been shown that a person with a negative attitude will often report more stress than someone who has a positive attitude.

What about physical well being? A poor diet puts the body in a state of physical stress which may weaken the immune system. A person could be more likely to get infections as a result. A poor diet may mean a person is making unhealthy food choices, not eating enough, or not eating on a normal schedule. That could lead to a nutritional deficiency that might cause emotional stress since the poor nutrition could negatively affect the way the brain processes information.

Physical activity is another important component which has many benefits. Not getting enough physical activity can put the body in a stressful state but a regular activity program can help decrease depression, if it exists. It also should help to improve the feeling of well-being.

We don't want to forget support systems. We all need someone in our lives we can rely on when we are having a hard time. Having little or no support makes stressful situations even more difficult to deal with.

Finally, finding ways and methods to relax is so important. People who don't have any outside interests, hobbies, or ways to relax may be unable to handle stressful situations because they have no outlet for their stress.

WAYS TO MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Change your thinking

- Make an effort to stop negative thoughts.
- Think positively and, when you have a negative thought, change it into a positive one.
- Plan something fun to do.
- Take a break and clear your mind.

Physical activity

- Start a physical activity program. Most experts recommend doing 20 minutes of activity at least three times per week. You do not have to join a gym. Twenty minutes of brisk walking outdoors will do the trick.
- Find a buddy to exercise with. It is more fun and it will encourage you to stick with your routine.
- Decide on a specific time, type, amount, and level of physical activity. Fit this time into your schedule so it can be part of your routine. (**Remember:** KC-CDC offers free exercise classes to all Pick 6 partners. Call 816-920-6840 to schedule a 6 week class with Myron Frye).

Nutrition

- Plan to eat foods that improve your health and well-being. For example, increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat.
- Use the Food Guide Pyramid to help you make healthy food choices. (**Remember:** KC-CDC offers free nutrition classes to all Pick 6 partners. Call 816-920-6840 to schedule a class with Maria L. Boudreaux and Associates.)
- Eat the right amount of food on a regular schedule.

Social support

- Make an effort to interact socially with people. Even though you feel stressed, it will be better for you to meet your friends, if only to get your mind off of things. (**Remember:** KC-CDC has a wonderful coalition meeting every other month. Come on by for a light meal and exciting presentations from 5-7 pm at the Pioneer College Auditorium. Our next meetings will be held on August 14 and October 9).
- Nurture yourself and others.
- Reach out to other people.

Relaxation

- Learn about and try using one or more of the many relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery, listening to music, practicing yoga, or do some meditation exercises. One or more of these techniques should work for you.
- Listen to your body.
- Take a mini retreat. (**Remember:** KC-CDC offers a Chronic Disease Self-Management Course at no cost to Pick 6 Partners. Come to learn some relaxation exercises and meet new friends for this 6 week program. Call Ella Tolbert or Tonya Williamson at 816-920-6840 to schedule a class or register for our class that starts on September 4 at Samuel U. Rodgers Health Center at 10 am.)
- Take time for personal interests and hobbies.

RESOURCES

If these stress management techniques do not work for you, there are professionals, such as licensed social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, who can help. Schedule time with one of these mental health professionals to help you learn stress management strategies, including relaxation techniques. Support groups of various types are also available throughout the community.