

Effective Stress Management Strategies
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I. *Introduction – The Problem...*

A. *Stress/anxiety is a pervasive problem*

- 20-30% of patients who visit family practice doctors have elevated levels of anxiety; some research reports have cited this as the most common problem family doctors have seen
- patients and physicians often (more than half of the time for physicians in one study) do not recognize significant anxiety problems
- Work is cited (February, 2006) as one the top two leading sources of stress (cited by 59% of adults along with money concerns).

B. *Stress/anxiety cause physical illness and interfere with effective recovery from medical problems*

- stress-linked illnesses include:

ulcers
diarrhea
backaches
constipation
migraine & tension headaches
strokes
hypertension (hi BP)
coronary artery disease
cancer

-- medical patients with anxiety problems take longer to recuperate

- hostility and anger associated with increased chance of death from both heart disease & cancer

C. **Recognition & healthy adaptation to stress is important**

-> problems arise when people are stressed and don't recognize this,
 - **OR** recognize their stress/anxiety but don't use adaptive coping responses

II. Define/Describe stress

A. Stress Definition

-> What is stress?
 [generate discussion]

Definition of Stress = Our reaction to events that disturb our equilibrium and tax our ability to respond

-> *How do I know that I am stressed?*

1) universal physiological response

initial alarm reaction (when first encounter a stressor):

incr breathing rate

incr HR & BP

body rushes to provide blood to CNS and major muscles

sugar dumped into bloodstream from quick energy

muscles tense

body perspires to cool itself

pupils dilate to incr. visual capabilities

digestion slows

bowel and bladder muscles relax

if stressor remains, results in physical prob's mentioned earlier:

diarrhea

backaches

constipation

migraine & tension headaches

ulcers

hypertension

exacerbated chronic pain

strokes

coronary artery disease

2) specific symptoms

Important to identify your own particular symptoms – your own red flags which indicate that you are stressed.

[refer to “signals, symptoms, or signs” list]

III. Dealing With Stress

- What do you find stressful?

-> Have folks discuss what are some commonly stressful things in their lives, and how they know they are stressed about these things.

provide e.g., stressor: bad drivers
 stress response: irritable, yelling, headache

□ One of the first steps in reducing stress is to accept and understand the impact of large and small changes in our lives.

[-> Have folks examine Holmes & Rahe scale.]

- Negative as well as positive changes can be stressful.

**the key to successful coping with stress: prepare & adapt

A. Prepare

1. time & priority management

“Nobody on their deathbed wishes they had spent more time at the office.”
- Senator Paul Simon (?)

“Only two kinds of problems ever reach my desk, those marked urgent, and those marked important -- and I spend so much time on the urgent, I never get to the important.”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

2. social support (a network of close relationships)

3. exercise

4. healthy eating

- Recent research from APA (reported February, 2006) shows that one in four Americans turns to food to help alleviate stress or deal with problems.

5. Develop a sense of meaning in life

e.g., religion/spirituality

B. Adapt

Serenity Prayer:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

- Reinhold Niebuhr

[Optional humorous alternative from a greeting card:

“Let me change what I can.
Let me accept which I cannot change.

Let me ignore that which I cannot change or accept.

Let me run away from that which I cannot change, accept, or ignore.

Let me lock myself in the bathroom, hold my hands over my ears, and hum about that which I cannot change, accept, ignore, or run away from.”]

two important adaptive approaches =

- 1) dealing w/ the problem, and
- 2) dealing with your reaction to the problem

also,

1. dealing assertively (not passively or aggressively) w/ conflicts

- Practice saying “no”.

2. using humor (especially toward yourself)

e.g., Two attractive female birds were showing off in front of some males. Both had spent two hours at the hairdresser, but it was the curly bird that got the perm.

3. engaging in productive leisure (take a break!)

e.g., - Leave the scene in a very stressful situation.

- Take an intermission.
- Use your vacation.

4. relaxation

IV. Changing Unhealthy Thinking Patterns

life events/changes are only modest predictors of stress & future health problems.

*-> how you think about a stressor partly determines how you will respond

Cognitive Distortions = certain ways of thinking that people regularly use to view life in an unreal way

- distort reality, lower self-esteem, hinder optimal functioning
- can increase stress in our lives, as well as depression & anger

A. Identifying Cognitive Distortions

1. Overgeneralization - From one isolated event, you make a general, universal rule.

Key words: never, always, all, every, nobody, etc.

- also includes *Polarized Thinking* - You lump things into extreme categories, with no middle ground.

-> a.k.a., either/or thinking; dichotomous thinking; black & white thinking
e.g., "You have to be perfect or you're worthless."

e.g., I never get to work on time.

I haven't stuck to my diet this week. I'll never be able to weight!

He's always giving me jobs at the last minute.

Nobody ever does this right.

2. Inflammatory/Global Labeling or Name Calling - You use sweeping, negative labels .

- negative judgments about a person's appearance, performance, intelligence, etc.
- calling people (including yourself, or even things) names

e.g., My house is a pigsty.

I'm a lazy bum.

That salesperson is an idiot.

My wife/husband so selfish.

3. Magnifying/Catastrophizing - You think things are worse than they really are.

Blowing things out of __proportion__.

-> events described as awful, terrible, disgusting, etc.

e.g., This is the worst thing that's ever happened.

My job is totally screwed up.

I can't stand the way that he is talking to me.

4. Demanding/Commanding - Making rules out of your preferences.

Key words: __should, ought to, must, have to, need to__

- it's healthy to have values and feel good when they are achieved and frustrated when they aren't

- it gets unhealthy when you make some of these unwritten commandments that you expect of yourself & others w/out mercy

- like keeping a set of unwritten rules - "Where's the rule book?"

Common themes:

a. Perfectionism

- I or others should do it correctly, perfectly, right, etc.

b. Others (key people) should love me.

- Certain people should love, like, approve, or support me.

c. Others (key people) should not dislike me.

- shld not express disapproval, criticism, or negative feelings toward me

d. Things should be fair (and just).

- it's not right when things are not just, fair, kind, courteous, respectful

e. Bad things shouldn't happen to me.

- I shouldn't have to deal w/ pain, frustration, delay, etc.

5. Blaming - You blame yourself (or others) for things that may not really be your (or their) ___fault_____.

-> see yourself as the martyr (pathologically responsible); try to control the uncontrollable; try to do too much

- often with the best of intentions

e.g., happens in families -- unjustifiably blaming yourself for you children's mistakes

*-> sure sign = over-apologizing

6. Mind Reading - You jump to conclusions and focus on a single negative explanation.

- don't consider alternate reasons.

- You assume that others think or feel certain negative ways about you without any real evidence that your assumptions are correct.

- assume that others don't like you, are angry with you, don't care about you, want to make you mad, etc.

e.g., Husband assuming his wife is angry at him when she is walking around with a frown on her face, but she really only has a headache.

"He corrected me to make me look stupid."

"They are just trying to embarrass me."

?-> Group Exercise: Review these 6 again, and pick your "favorite" cognitive distortion.

B. How to Combat Cognitive Distortions

Most importantly be watchful / vigilant!

-> pay attn to thoughts that are present when you feel stresses or depressed.

Keep a list of:

1. your **damaging self-statements**
2. the **specific cognitive distortion**
3. your rebuttal

-> think of your rebuttal as:

- **healthy coach (if athletically inclined)**
- **accepting friend (known you for yrs & accepts you totally)**
- **assertive agent (thinks you're the greatest!)**
- **rational teacher (stern but kindly; #1 goal is for you to learn and show you the right way)**
- **compassionate mentor (older, wiser person)**

Guidelines for effective rebuttals

To be most effective, develop rebuttals which are:

A. strong.

- "NO!"
- think of big red stop sign

B. nonjudgmental.

- > be compassionate; be forgiving of yourself & others
- > concentrate on what is, not what should be
- > e.g., you're not selfish, you just wanted some time for yourself

C. specific.

- What are the facts? What would stand up in court? What do I know for sure? How can I check this out?

- Look for exceptions to the rule.

D. ___balanced_____.

- include positive as well as the negative
- Use appropriate qualifiers – e.g., sometimes, occasionally, usually
- e.g., “My cholesterol is too high, but it has dropped recently.”

V. Type A, Hostility, & Effective Coping

Type A = strongly motivated to overcome obstacles and driven to achieve and meet goals

Type B = relaxed and unhurried

opposite ends of one continuum

Type A Comic Strip Characters:

- Lucy (vs. Linus)
- Sarge (Snorkel) (vs. Beetle Bailey)
- Mr. Dithers (vs. Dagwood)

Type A's and Work Performance:

- seem to work faster even when no pressure or deadline is involved
- complain less about hard work; report being less tired when finished
- do more poorly on tasks requiring patience or careful, considered judgement

Type A's & achvment: work harder and achieve more, but may not be as happy

?- Which type of personality would you find in top management?

A: most members of top mgmt are Type B's not type A's

- likely the impractical hurried style of Type A is not compatible w/ the skills needed of top-level exec.'s

3 components of Type A:

- 1) competitive achievement striving
- 2) time urgency (some evidence for link to health)
- 3) aggressiveness & hostility (most evidence for link w/ health problems)

- excessive anger & hostility are associated w/ increased mortality from both heart disease & cancer (Smith, 1992)

- even suppressed anger is associated with increased chances of hypertension and high blood pressure

- relaxation & anger don't mix