

STRESS MANAGEMENT

OBJECTIVES

Staff will learn common causes and symptoms of stress, as well as stress reduction techniques.

- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports stress related disorders as becoming the most prevalent reason for worker disability.
- Job Stress is estimated to cost American industry 200 to 300 billion dollars annually by absenteeism, diminished productivity, employee turnover, accidents, direct medical, legal, and insurance fees, worker's compensation awards, etc.
- The US Bureau of Labor cites "neurotic reaction to stress" as the 4th leading cause of disabling workplace injuries.
- 75 % of American workers indicate that they feel stress on the job.

Everyone experiences stress from time to time, so it is perfectly normal. However, normal doesn't necessarily mean healthy nor is it inevitable. Believe it or not, you can learn how to largely eliminate stress. I don't mean eliminate the pressures in your life- those will probably persist. Pressure is what is happening to you, but stress is how you react to those pressures. You can keep the pressure and get rid of the stress.

Stress is unavoidable. Whether it's triggered by an attacking tiger in the jungle or by office politics, it is a fact of life. The good news, stress needn't be hazardous to our health. We can learn to manage the stress in our lives and be happy that we did.

The stress we experience today is more intense and unrelenting than that experienced by our primitive ancestors. When a tiger attacked primitive man, man's body responded with the classic "fight or flight" reaction. Through dramatic chemical changes, his body physiologically prepared itself for two options: flee or attack. His choices were clear; he was either eaten, in which case ongoing stress wasn't an issue, or he survived and his body quickly returned to normal. Regardless of the outcome, his body's response to stress was geared for survival.

Today, the stress we experience is less obvious and more pervasive. For many, stress is not an ally but the cause of deteriorating health, lack of productivity, or depression. Unlike the tiger encounter, the stress we experience today is not

nearly as tangible. Consequently, our options for relieving stress aren't as clear-cut. We focus on relieving the symptoms rather than locating the cause. This allows stress to become pervasive in our lives

Stress is often produced by the way we react to events, rather than by the events themselves. For instance, we may have the idea that if someone corrects or criticizes the way we have done something that means they think we are incompetent or "no good." But criticism can actually be valuable feedback that will help us to function in more productive ways. Of course criticism is a lot easier to take if it's delivered in a supportive or constructive way, but cruel or mean-spirited criticism is more of a reflection on the critic than the recipient.

We can't expect approval for our every action, because by being human, we sometimes are in the wrong or make mistakes. We need to keep things in perspective. You've heard the old saying, "Don't sweat the small stuff." We can recognize ourselves as basically good people and ordinarily do a good job. Even in the case of real failures, we can refuse to concentrate on the negative but rather accentuate the positive giving ourselves credit for the things we do well.

CAUSES OF STRESS

With respect to work, we all have similar problems and concerns. The following are some of the most common work-related stress issues and complaints:

BASIC ISSUE	SYMPTOM or COMPLAINT
Lack of Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Undefined job responsibilities * No input in policy or office changes * Overworked * Not having adequate resources to do job * Elections, who will be my boss
Lack of Recognition or Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No method for fair or consistent performance evaluation * No reward or incentive for work well done * Employees feel taken for granted
Uncertainty about Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Concerns about job security * Conflicting messages from management * Too many supervisors * Unexplained changes in workplace (layoffs, reorganization, political changes, budget cuts, etc.)
Boredom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Skills are under-utilized, lack of priorities, sloppy work

COMMON STRESS SYMPTOMS

No matter how hard we try, we can't keep stress locked inside or ignore it. Doctors estimate that 75 percent of all medical complaints are stress-related. Common complaints include:

- Sweating
- Pounding pulse
- Constant worry
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Chronic fatigue
- Sexual dysfunction
- Cynicism, negativity, and irritability
- Feelings of helplessness
- Indigestion
- Ulcers/diarrhea
- Headaches
- Muscle aches
- High blood pressure/heart attacks/strokes
- Chronic illnesses (flu, colds, etc.)
- Hives

At least 50 percent of the population suffers from at least one of these stress symptoms on a regular basis.

STRESS REDUCTION TECHNIQUES

Be Realistic: Don't take on everything; learn to say no. Set realistic goals for yourself. If you're overwhelmed, try eliminating an activity that is not absolutely necessary. Prioritize, what really needs to get done.

Meditate: It only takes about 10-20 minutes to get a benefit from meditating. These few moments of quiet reflection will reduce stress and increase your tolerance to it.

Visualize: Take a moment to picture how you can manage a stressful situation more calmly and successfully. A visual rehearsal gives self-confidence and helps you have a more positive attitude toward a difficult task.

Take One Thing at a Time: When you start to feel overwhelmed, try taking one task at a time. Make a list of things you need to accomplish; the most urgent task should be at the top. Once accomplished, cross it off and move to the next.

Exercise: Regular exercise is a great way to reduce stress, and it benefits the body and mind. Just 20-30 minutes activity a day can do the trick.

Hobbies: Take a break from the stressors of life and do something you really enjoy.

Healthy Lifestyles: Eating healthy will make a difference. Avoiding things like smoking, excessive alcohol, and unhealthy foods will help. A well balanced lifestyle is essential for a healthy lifestyle.

Share Your Feelings: Talking about things can help you feel better. A conversation with a friend or family can help you relax.

Give in Occasionally: You don't always have to be right. Be flexible. Be willing to compromise. If you're right, stand your ground, but be calm and rational.

Go Easy with Criticism: When you expect too much from yourself or others, you may end up feeling frustrated, let down, and disappointed. Remember that each person is unique and everyone, including yourself, has shortcomings.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): If the organization has an EAP, take advantage and use it. Don't let stress affect your health and wellness.

POLICY

Discuss all policies related stress management and the organization's Employee Assistance Program, if applicable.

CLOSING

- *Encourage discussion about the presentation and stressors each of us face daily.*
- *Encourage discussion about the things employees can do to reduce stress.*