



U.S. Public Health Service Nursing - Tip of the Month

May TIP 2014

Stress Management



Five Tips to Help Manage Stress

Stress can occur when you perceive that demands placed on you- such as work, school or relationships - exceed your ability to cope. Some stress can be beneficial at times, producing a boost that provides the drive and energy to help people get through situations like exams or work deadlines. However, an extreme amount of stress can have health consequences, affecting the immune, cardiovascular and neuroendocrine and central nervous systems, and take a severe emotional toll.

Untreated chronic stress can result in serious health conditions including anxiety, insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system. Research shows that stress can contribute to the development of major illnesses, such as heart disease, depression and obesity.

But by finding positive, healthy ways to manage stress as it occurs, many of these negative health consequences can be reduced. Everyone is different, and so are the ways they choose to manage their stress. Some people prefer pursuing hobbies such as gardening, playing music and creating art, while others find relief in more solitary activities: meditation, yoga and walking.

Here are five healthy techniques that psychological research has shown to help reduce stress in the short- and long-term.

Take a break from the stressor. It may seem difficult to get away from a big work project, a crying baby or a growing credit card bill. But when you give yourself permission to step away from it, you let yourself have time to do something else, which can help you have a new perspective or practice techniques to feel less overwhelmed. It's important to not avoid your stress (those bills have to be paid sometime), but even just 20-minutes to take care of yourself is helpful.

Exercise. The research keeps growing - exercise benefits your mind just as well as your body. We keep hearing about the long-term benefits of a regular exercise routine. But even a 20-minute walk, run, swim or dance session in the midst of a stressful time can give an immediate effect that can last for several hours.

Smile and laugh. Our brains are interconnected with our emotions and facial expressions. When people are stressed, they often hold a lot of the stress in their face. So laughs or smiles can help relieve some of that tension and improve the situation.

Get social support. Call a friend, send an email. When you share your concerns or feelings with another person, it does help relieve stress. But it's important that the person whom you talk to is someone whom you trust and whom you feel can understand and validate you. If your family is a stressor, for example, it may not alleviate your stress if you share your works woes with one of them.

Meditate. Meditation and mindful prayer help the mind and body to relax and focus. Mindfulness can help people see new perspectives, develop self-compassion and forgiveness. When practicing a form of mindfulness, people can release emotions that may have been causing the body physical stress. Much like exercise, research has shown that even meditating briefly can reap immediate benefits.

Source: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/manage-stress.aspx>

EAP is always here for you: 1-800-222-0364; www.foh4you.com

Helpful Links:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/features/handlingstress/>

<http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/students/self-care/exercises.asp>

PHS-NURSING LIST SERVE

<http://list.nih.gov/archives/phsnursing-l.html>

Background: Historic USPHS Hospital Seattle opened in 1933 as a Marine Hospital. Re-designated as a USPHS Hospital in 1951 till ceasing government operations in 1981.



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