

Defuse Stress Before Its Damage Is Done

A high level of stress is likely to become the No. 1 killer of the 21st century! We already know that stress contributes to a lower immune system that in turn makes us more susceptible to colds and flu, several varieties of cancer, heart disease, depression and anxiety disorders, and other mental illness.

For all of the reasons mentioned above, it is imperative that we learn to cope with our daily stressors. If our physical, mental and emotional health deteriorate, how in the world will we be able to enjoy life? People seem too busy in their daily lives to stop and take advantage of new procedures designed to help us deal with stress. Once you begin to learn and incorporate a stress-reducing activity into your lifestyle, it will become second nature -- and it will make your life much more healthy and fulfilling.

First, it is important that you learn to identify your stress. There are basically two types of stress: Things that affect you from the external environment (external stressors) and those behaviors that are created within ourselves (internal stressors).

The daily external stressors are those that we all face. They include traffic jams, a broken refrigerator, the loss of a wallet, and so on. Then there are other external stressors. These social stressors include dealing with your boss' temper, your mate's annoying habits, your best friend's attitude, etc. Yet another type of external stressor includes the major life events such as the death of a loved one, a marriage, a new birth and so on.

The internal stressors are things that we have more control over and can alter if we so desire. These include negative self-talk, living an unhealthy lifestyle, mental traps (cognitive distortions) and personality makeup.

You must begin to take note as to what triggers stress you. For example, some people may be able to work as an emergency room nurse with low levels of stress, but that same person may fall apart in heavy traffic. It is

important to understand that what one person finds stressful another person may find challenging and exciting.

More sources of stress: Money, illness, time management, significant other, social life, children, parents, family problems, work, co-workers, supervisors, commuting and household problems.

Before you can ease your stress, you must know where it is coming from! Keeping a stress journal (diary) is one of the best ways of pinpointing exactly what causes you stress.

In your stress diary you can note your stress levels and how you feel throughout the day. You must begin paying attention to events as they occur. Each hour, record the time, how happy you feel, how stressed you feel, whether or not you are enjoying what you are engaged in, and how efficient you are being at that time. You can use a scale from 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest). Or, you can customize the scale as you desire.

Further, when a stressful event occurs, (it doesn't have to be during your hourly notation), write down the following: What happened, where it occurred, how stressed you felt and how you handled it.

Eventually, you will begin to notice patterns emerging. Look for recurring examples of stress, how they made you feel and how you coped. This will allow you to uncover how your daily routine affects you and begin to make the necessary changes you require to live a more happy and healthy lifestyle.