MARYLAND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
COLLEGE PARK•EASTERN SHORE

Fact Sheet

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Managing stress is a lifelong task. To successfully manage it, you periodically need to think about the sources of stress in your life and your success or lack of success with coping techniques.

Look at Your Attitude

Your attitude helps determine how you perceive experiences—as either pleasant or unpleasant. In general, people can control how they choose to see things. Maggie Manages and Warren Worries are two such people.

•Warren thinks life is the pits.

•Maggie has a positive attitude toward life and uses the power of positive thinking.

•Warren worries and most of the things he worries about never occur.

•Maggie finds talking with a friend helps clarify her problems and worries.

•Warren will not accept what he cannot change; he groans, mumbles, and complains a lot.

•Maggie has a good sense of humor and has learned to laugh at herself.

•Warren believes he needs his 12 and 3 o'clock martinis to get through the day.

•Maggie knows alcohol or drugs may only worsen her daily routine.

•Warren is a perfectionist and expects everyone to conform to his goals and standards.

•Maggie sets high goals and standards but she recognizes and accepts human limitations.

If your attitudes are like Warren's, consider taking some tips from Maggie's behavior. This is your first step in managing stress—identifying to what extent you contribute to the problem.

Consider Your Physical Condition

Exercise. Regular vigorous exercise helps to reduce anxiety and relieve tension. Everyone needs outlets for pent-up emotions. Try brisk walking, swimming, biking, or any other active sport.

Keep healthy. Good nutrition, sufficient sleep, and rest are essential for better health.

Relax. Plan your week to include several relaxing activities.

Look at Sources of Stress

Indicate which of the following statements are true.

1 ____ Drugs, alcohol, and self-medication are effective stress controllers.

2 ____ Noise can cause stress.

3 ____ Unanticipated changes and crises can cause stress.

4 ____ Using good communication skills and expressing feelings will decrease stress.

5 ____ Occasionally altering your routine will increase stress.

Numbers 2, 3, and 4 are true. The second step in managing stress is identifying outside sources of stress.

Make a list of sources of stress in your life.

Identify good management techniques that have worked for you in the past and write them below. Can any of them be used to reduce or eliminate the stress sources you listed?

Think about the solutions that are the easiest to implement. Which solutions will be risky or difficult to carry out? List them below and note who can help you with them? Give top priority to the items that are the greatest sources of stress.

Make Plans and Set Goals

Capability Quiz

Rate yourself always (2), sometimes (1), or never (0) on the following statements.

____ I establish goals and work towards them.

____ I schedule recreation and hobbies.

____ I organize my work and set priorities.

____ I make lists and checkoff tasks as they are completed.

____ I take one thing at a time.

____ I plan uninterrupted blocks of time for big jobs or several smaller ones.

If you scored less than six points, use these statements to begin adopting less stressful ways of handling your life's activities. This is the third step in managing stress—developing techniques to minimize stress.

A Few Words About Job Stress

In recent years, stress on the job has been featured in newspapers and magazines and on television. This media coverage has focused on the relationship between job stress and physical and mental health. Experts believe stress can contribute to the development of life-threatening illnesses. A few organizations recognize the high costs of stress and are helping their employees by building physical fitness facilities and promoting programs for controlling tension. However, most people have to rely on their own efforts to learn how best to cope with job stress.

Some Guidelines

•It is easier to change yourself, your ideas, feelings or attitudes than it is to alter bureaucratic ideology and structure.

•Be alert to high-stress habits, such as competing constantly, setting quotas, and overscheduling.

•Develop a variety of on-the-job sources for gratification.

•Periodically evaluate the sources of distress and your coping methods.

•If job stress persists after a reasonable period of time, it is time to reidentify the source(s) and reevaluate your coping methods.

•Develop coworker support networks and, if you can, share workloads.

•Take creative lunch breaks: explore the outdoors or an area within walking distance.

•Sometimes it may help to go in early or stay late to avoid taking work home or to cut down on the total amount of work.

•If you are under a great deal of stress, shorten your conversations and ask people to leave messages.

•Learn to be assertive, to express differences, and to say no. Speak up about things that annoy you but remember to respect other people's feelings.

•Consider changing your job or having your job responsibilities changed to better suit your skills and interests.

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