



To stress a point

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Stress — we hear about it all the time on television lifestyle programs, in the health clinic, and in various publications that cross our desk or our mailboxes, but what does it mean to you? Incorporating professional development into your already tight schedule may increase your stress levels, but with careful management you can avoid the negative impact that stress can have on your daily routine, harness the positive energy that can result and manage all that you want to achieve.

To many of us, stress is how we describe the effects of too little time to do all the things we are expected to or want to. But stress is pervasive and occurs when the body is continually in a state of 'red alert.' Given a certain set of circumstances, your body starts to pump adrenaline in preparation

for our natural tendency to 'fight or flight'. And, even if you diffuse the situation and avoid the need for either fight or flight, your body doesn't realise that you have sorted it all out and is setting up for action stations.

When you don't expend that extra energy, your body goes into a state of false alarm. If this happens on a regular basis, your vital organs and immune system will become strained and shoot you right up the vulnerability scale, leaving you a sitting duck for everything from cold sores, to lack of sleep and even serious heart problems.

Defining your own stress levels is important, and whilst doing so, consider that the definition of 'stressful' will vary from one person to the next. You need to consider each situation on its own merits and think about your level of control. If you feel that you are being controlled rather than in control, chances are that you are experiencing some level of stress.

Stress can have a negative effect on the workplace as well as the individual. Studies have shown that increased stress levels in the office can lead to absenteeism amongst staff, lowered morale levels, employee burnout, difficulty in hiring new employees and an increase in staff turnover. While you may not be able to tackle your entire workplace, there are a few things you can do to ease your own stress levels if you feel them creeping up on you:

- Take a few deep breaths before reacting to a situation.
- Smile! It eases the tension that can build up in your facial muscles and can immediately calm an irritated customer or colleague.
- Get some exercise — a quick walk around the block or up and down a few flights of stairs can rid your body of that excess adrenaline and aid the flow of oxygen to your brain.
- Drink plenty of water. Most of us don't drink enough water during the day to maintain an adequate level of hydration. Keeping your water intake up 'lubricates your joints and eyes, moisturises your skin, maintains muscle tone, aids digestion, eliminates toxic wastes, prevents constipation, transports nutrients around your body and supports the central nervous system, which in turn reduces stress.' (*Drink your way to good health* by Glenn Harris, <http://www.livingnow.com.au/handh/s1healthandhealingstories10.htm>)

You are the manager of your own lifestyle, so listen to what your body is telling you and look after it. Stress can have an impact on all areas of your life and your wellbeing, so take care of your most important asset — you! ■

Some tips on keeping the stressors at bay:

- Accept that you can't do it all and delegate tasks to others.
- Skip the multitasking and do one thing at a time.
- Create a routine and set aside a couple of hours one evening a week for must-do chores such as paying bills.
- Tune out and schedule one TV- and phone-free night each week.
- Plan ahead, figure out your weekly menus and shop in advance for groceries.
- Keep a to-do list and look at what has to be done that day and whether anything can be postponed.
- Stop worrying about other people's expectations.
- Let it out — talk about what's stressing you with your friends and family.

[http://www3.weightwatchers.com/international/aus/healthy_living/article_stress.html]

If you feel that you are experiencing undue levels of stress and are having difficulties in keeping the levels at bay, please seek professional advice from your doctor or a counsellor. ■