

STRESS MANAGEMENT

“When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters: one represents danger and the other represents opportunity.” –Unknown

Did you know that stress is considered the most prevalent health problem in America? That’s right, more common than that cold that seems to crop up several times a year and linger forever. It seems everywhere you turn, there are people promoting ways to decrease stress: spend a getaway weekend in the Poconos, relax with a spa and mudbath treatment once a week, hire a masseuse. If you don’t quite have the bucks necessary for those stress reducers, fear not - there are things you can do for much less!

First, we need to recognize that stress is not necessarily negative. The birth of a child, a wedding, a job promotion - all of these come with their own stress but are not considered negative events. There is both positive and negative stress out there; our trick is to eliminate as much negative stress as possible, or else change it into positive stress.

How can we do this? Take a moment to list your top ten sources of negative stress. Is a particular class adding incredible stress to your life? Does one of your roommates not carry his weight around the apartment?

Next, circle those that you are willing and able to reduce or eliminate from your life. You may have several items circled, or maybe none at all.

Now, create an action plan for those items circled. What can you do to reduce these stressors? Getting a tutor or meeting regularly with the T.A. can help you understand your course material better. You and your roommates can divide up chores around the apartment equally and develop a plan of how to handle someone who does not live up to their end of the deal. Brainstorm your options and put your action plan on paper.

You might think the only way to solve a particular problem is to do something major, such as dropping a class or moving out of the apartment. Before taking such drastic measures, be sure to generate as many alternatives as you can and evaluate your options thoroughly. Do not be afraid to enlist the help of someone else in this situation, either. A counselor, mentor or friend can help provide objective feedback to your situation.

These strategies will help you deal with specific stressors in your life. To reduce your amount of stress in general, adopt these tips into your routine:

- Take charge. Do not let other people, deadlines or an overload of commitments run your life for you. List all the activities and commitments in which you currently participate. Take a close look at each one and ask yourself how you are truly benefiting from them as well as how much time and energy they require. You may need to eliminate some of those

activities that are not benefiting more than they are costing.

- Change your perception. Learn to view situations as a result of choice - not as a victim. Your outlook will improve, as will your attitude towards change. Rather than, “I can not afford to go out for dinner tonight,” choose “I am going to eat in tonight to save money for the basketball game on Saturday.”
- Self-affirmation. If Stuart Smalley of Saturday Night Live fame pops into your head at the thought of this, you are not alone. Although his approach is humorous, the concept truly does work: making positive statements about yourself will help you think more highly of yourself.
- Take good care. Eating healthy foods, drinking plenty of water, sleeping enough each night and exercising regularly all play a part in your physical and emotional well-being.
- Breathe! That element of life we tend to take for granted. Most people use less than 60% of their full breathing potential, however. Practicing breathing exercises can help improve your techniques as well as relax you.
- Yoga. You do not have to fill your room with incense and candles to reap the benefits of yoga (although there are cases supporting the benefits of aromatherapy, too). Learning a stretching program increases your body awareness and gives you additional energy.
- Laughter - the best medicine. What makes you truly happy? Make time for fun in your life. This should not be low on your list of priorities, either. Smiles and laughter can do wonders for body and soul.

Because everyone is different, don't be afraid to try different things to find out what reduces your stress. Taking long walks alone works for some people, whereas others prefer to go out for a soda with their friends. Depending on your personal preference, different techniques may work to reduce your stress at different times. The key is to take control of your stress—before it takes control of you.

Reference:

Geber, Sara Zeff. (1996). How to Manage Stress For Success. NY: AMACOM.

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