

Marital Stress

In a marriage, some stress is good because it makes each partner work at the marriage. There are two types of stress: Eustress and Distress. Eustress is good stress that makes you do something better. Distress is bad stress that changes you when bad things happen. Because more than 50 percent of all marriages now end in divorce, following are several ways to help deal with the stress that may be putting strain on your marriage:

1. Find out what things stress you out and figure out how to eliminate them.
2. Talk about your problems with friends.
3. Exercise.
4. Keep a sense of humor.
5. Don't worry about mistakes.
6. Say no when you don't want to do something.

Marital stress is worst when partners take their stress out on each other. Your spouse may be blamed even when it is not his or her fault, because she or he is the one who is there for you to take out your anger. Often your spouse will do the same thing to you. This can create a vicious cycle. The following tips should help you break this cycle:

1. **Take time to relax.** When you get home from work, relax for a while before starting a serious conversation.
2. **Ask your partner if anything is upsetting him or her.** Talk with your partner and find out what is bothering him or her. Do not try to guess at what is making them upset.
3. **Learn how you and your partner react to stress.** Some react by not talking; others by complaining, sleeping, drinking alcohol, or taking it out on loved ones. Once you understand how you and your partner react to stress, your relationship should get better.
4. **Don't take it personally.** It is important to remember to try to not take it personally when your partner gets angry while under stress.
5. **Ask each other for what you need.** It is important to tell your partner what you want and need. The more specific you can be, the more likely your partner will be able to do it.
6. **Forgive yourself and your partner.** Forgiveness is important for a successful marriage.
7. **Spend time together.** Spending time together helps make a healthy relationship.

One of the most common problems in a marriage is money. Many couples fight about who can spend it, who will earn it, and who will make decisions about it. If your spouse likes to spend and you are a saver, there will probably be problems. The following tips may be helpful:

1. Discuss how money was handled when you were growing up. This very often affects a person's attitude about money as an adult.

2. Discuss how you will spend and save money today and in the future.
3. Establish a budget and decide if you each want your own account or separate accounts.
4. Write down how much you spend.
5. Get professional help from an accountant or financial advisor if you don't feel you can manage it yourself.
6. Make sure you and your partner talk to each other and come to an agreement that works for both of you.

There are more ways to lower stress in your marriage:

1. Talk to a minister, priest, rabbi or other clergy if you cannot talk to your partner.
2. Don't allow you or your partner to worry about past mistakes.
3. Avoid blaming and judging each other—just listen.
4. Try to understand what your partner is feeling.
5. Think about the good parts of the marriage instead of the bad.
6. Don't bring up past mistakes in the marriage—this will only make things worse.
7. Make a plan. Both of you should think about how you can solve a particular problem.

Help is out there! You do not have to handle marital problems alone. Following are examples of when to ask for professional help: drinking too much alcohol; doing drugs; domestic violence; sadness that doesn't go away; depression; gambling too much; a child with a serious physical or emotional problem; when you and your partner can't agree on things such as work, money, sex, raising the children; and when either partner has decided to separate.

The **Employee Service Program** can be used by all state employees and their families for help with personal problems. This service is *free and confidential*. ESP may refer employees to counseling or treatment services. All or part of the costs for these services may be paid with the employee's health insurance.

For additional help, you may want to read any one or all of the following books:

1. *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: The Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex*, John Grey, Ph.D., HarperCollins Publishers, New York, NY.
2. *Men, Women and Relationships*, by John Grey, Ph.D., HarperCollins Publishers, New York, NY.
3. *Making Marriage Work for Dummies*, by Steven Simring, M.D., Sue Klavans Simring, D.S.W., Hungry Minds, Inc., New York, NY.

