

## Stress: A Positive Life Force

Stress is a basic force of life which can allow us to reach higher levels of performance. When managed properly, stress is a powerful ally for growth and accomplishment. Without stress, our lives would be monotonous. However, too much stress over a prolonged period of time can deteriorate our physical and mental well being. There are two types of stress: Eustress, this is the good kind of stress. It is the excitement displayed at the football game and crying when you are happy. The other kind of stress is Distress: this is the type of stress we relate to the word "stress" this is the negative stress. Examples are: worrying about a test, being yelled at, and traumatic situations. The signs and symptoms of stress may include: cold hands, frequent gritting of teeth, high blood pressure, easy irritability, sudden change of appetite, upset stomach, poor concentration, difficulty in thinking, lowered self-esteem.

Stress affects us differently due to the meaning we put on various events and our thoughts about them. Stress reactions occur in three stages. The first stage is the Alarm Stage. The Alarm Stage marks the first contact with the stressor. When we are startled, angry or scared our body adds adrenaline to the blood stream. This causes our breathing to speed up. Blood flow to the brain and muscles increases; digestion slows; vision improves, blood pressure goes up, palms sweat and our mouth gets dry. All of this allows us to perform at a high level physically, giving us the phrase; "fight or flight." The "fight or flight" reaction prepares us to meet the stressors head on (fight) or run from it (flight). Whatever happens, the body is ready. Once the body is ready, the decision must be made to meet the stressor or run.

After the Alarm Stage, we move into the Resistance Stage. Resistance is a form of adjustment that lasts until the stressor stops. If the stressful situation continues, the body continues the changes that started in the first stage. The heart still pumps faster, perspiration continues, etc. This will continue as long as the stressor continues. Once the stressful situation is over, the body returns to a pre-alarm state. In other words, we calm down. If the stressor continues over a long period of time, the body's ability to resist is lost and exhaustion sets in.

The third stage of the stress reaction is the Exhaustion Stage. This stage does not have to be reached. When the body cannot resist the stressor any longer, exhaustion sets in. The body simply gives out.

There will always be some stress in our lives. The management of stress in an effective manner is the goal rather than the elimination of it. To cope with stress, we need to be able to identify stressors in our lives, and understand the feelings the stressors generate. Effective stress management is a combination of a healthy lifestyle, effective management of emotions and the ability to think differently about some things in our lives. The following are some effective ways to manage your stress. GET PHYSICAL- if you can, try to exercise daily, exercise diverts your mind and builds strength. To help increase your energy level you also need to eat a well balanced diet. This includes eating high fiber, low-fat foods with lots of fruits and vegetables. A positive attitude is also important. It is nearly impossible to maintain a positive attitude all the time, but we can strive to keep one most of the time. We chose our attitude, so we decide if it is a positive or a negative one. Your attitude affects everything you do in both your personal and professional lives. Author Keith Harrell notes, "When you look in the mirror, you see the person who can do the most to improve your life, change your attitude, elevate your standards, and overcome your limitations."

Here are some other positive ways to cope with stress.

- Learn to say no when you really can't take on m
- Walk whenever possible
- If you are married, feed kids separately once in awhile
- Cut down on caffeine
- Play, have fun

- Get plenty of sleep
- Use humor
- Think positive about yourself
- Set personal goals
- Don't use alcohol or drugs as stress reducers
- Set personal goals
- Be able to laugh at yourself
- Do something for someone else (It feels good)
- Practice relaxation techniques (reading, meditation, watch movies)
- Use positive body language
- Praise others-it will come back