Strategies for Stress Relief

Presented by BHS

- TRAINER
- DATE GIVEN
“It’s not stress that kills us, it’s our reaction to it.” - Hans Selye
Objectives

• Define stress
• What causes stress?
• Signs and symptoms
• How willing are you?
• Understand your stress
• Understand what you can and cannot control
• Build your toolkit
• Review and takeaways
What is Stress?

• Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to the demands of life.

• Stress is a feeling that we are overloaded or overwhelmed, struggling to meet the demands in front of us.

• Stress is the body’s natural defense against predators and danger. It flushes the body with hormones to prepare systems to evade or confront danger – the “fight or flight” mechanism.

• Stress exists on a scale – mild to extreme – e.g. aggressive behavior, an intruder, a first date, etc.

• The more stressors we experience, the more stressed we tend to feel.
Stress & Health

Daily stress impacts our health and wellbeing. We are hardwired to react to worry and stress in ways that protect us from things perceived as harmful. If we are worried, frightened or upset, we can enter flight-or-flight mode.

• In fight-or-flight, adrenaline will increase heart-rate, blood pressure and ready the body’s energy supplies; cortisol will surge.

• Increased cortisol, caused by chronic stress, can be responsible for decreased immune functioning, weight gain, difficulty losing weight, increased blood pressure, and heart disease.
Physical Signs of Stress

- Low energy/exhaustion
- Headaches
- Tight shoulders/neck
- Gastrointestinal difficulties
- Sleep troubles
- Nightmares or disturbing dreams
- Aches and pains
- Elevated heart rate
- Sweating
- Clenching or grinding teeth
- Frequent colds or sickness
- Change in appetite
- Heartburn or nausea
- Nervous habits, fidgeting, feet tapping
- Difficulty focusing or concentrating
- Difficulty calming down
Emotional & Behavioral Signs of Stress

- Irritability or anger
- Anxiety or restlessness
- Depression or sadness
- Feeling guilt or worry
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loneliness and isolation
- Paranoia or fear
- Crying or tearful
- Lack of interest in activities
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Increased alcohol, drug or food intake
- Blaming others
- Irritated by petty things
- Difficulty making decisions
- Trouble learning new information
- Increase in taking OTC medicines
What To Do When You’re Stressed

• The **FIRST** thing to do when you’re stressed is recognize you’re stressed. *PAY ATTENTION* to your body, mind and spirit.

• The **SECOND** thing you must do is identify the trigger – is it something you can control? Or is it out of your control?

• Then **THIRD**, you must identify what you’re willing to do to alleviate your stress. What kind of help or action do you need?
Where is your stress?

When we want to reduce stress, we need to think very seriously about where our stress is coming from.

Take an inventory:

- Marriage/relationship?
- Children?
- Work/professional life?
- Relationship to your body/food/alcohol/drugs?
- Major illness in family?
- Recent loss or death?
- Money?
- General unhappiness with life?
Build Your Stress Toolkit: Willingness

First things first: when thinking of what new actions or behaviors you want to try, think about **WILLINGNESS**. Willingness is KEY.

For example, you might WANT to meditate every morning for 20 minutes, but you might not have willingness to wake up earlier to do it. This is okay! We need to work within the real parameters of your willingness. Maybe instead, you have willingness to sit quietly with your eyes closed on your commute and just breathe.
What Needs to Change?

When we want to reduce stress, we need to think critically about what we’re willing to change. Take an inventory:

- Improve basic self care (sleep, food, exercise)
- Have a serious conversation with someone in your life (coworker, spouse, child, parent)
- Improve social life and hobbies (engage in more nurturing activities outside work)
- Stop or curb unhelpful behavior – drinking, staying up too late, social media, smoking, etc.
- Start seeing a therapist, a doctor, a nutritionist, a career coach or any sort of paid professional to help you
The Basics

- Food
- Exercise
- Sleep

These pillars of life are often where our stress shows up – e.g. eating too much, not sleeping enough or not exercising. They are also your *first line of defense*. If you’re stressed and you don’t know what to do, focus on these most basic elements of self-care.
The Basics (cont.)

Focus on the basics in a sustainable way. Many people struggle with worry and anxiety. Exercise is proven to help reduce these symptoms, but many struggle to sustain regular exercise.

What is a sustainable, realistic change you can make to get more movement into your life?

- Do you need an accountability buddy?
- Do you need a trainer?
- Do you need help?
- Do you need to get clearance from a doctor first?

What are you willing to do to exercise more?
Small Changes = Big Impact

Small changes are the most sustainable

Many people want to lose weight, but changing how we eat is HARD.

What are small, incremental changes you might be able to make?

• Can you give up just ONE food that you know is not good for you?
• Can you switch from diet soda to flavored seltzer?
• What changes are you willing to make?
What Can You Control?

When we’re stressed, it’s helpful to remember what we can and cannot control. The ONLY thing you can control is yourself. Here is a list of what you can control:

- What you say and what you do
- Your honesty
- The effort you give to your work and family
- How much you smile and say thank you
- How much you gossip
- How much time you spend on social media
- Whether or not you ask for help
What You Cannot Control

Most of us understand intellectually that we cannot control others or big situations.

- You cannot control other people – this is a big one. You cannot control your spouse, your children or your boss.
- Most situations!
- Other people’s problems. We can, of course, be good friends and help others. But begin to recognize the difference between helping someone and meddling or over-extending yourself. *Are you doing too much?*
Identify Your Fears

A big part of stress is thinking about what MIGHT happen. Can you begin to recognize when you’re projecting a catastrophic future? Do you doubt your ability to cope with disappointment? Do you doubt your ability to cope with disappointing others?

- What does the worst-case scenario look like? Is there a silver lining?
- Are you replaying catastrophic outcomes in your head? Can you redirect your thinking?
“I’ve had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.”

MARK TWAIN
Tips & Tricks: Ideas for Action

• Prep for tomorrow
• Put your phone away
• Call a friend
• Go outside
• Go for a 10-minute walk
• Drink some water
• Get a massage
• Plan a day out of town
• Pet an animal

• Arm yourself with healthy snacks
• Calm your breathing
• Talk about what’s bothering you
• Do something specifically to help your stress – you’re worth it!
• Take a nap
• Laugh
• Work on the thing you’ve been putting off
More Serious Questions

- Sometimes stress, worry, anxiety and general tension is more than just challenging circumstances.

- Make sure you’re in good shape by seeing a doctor if you need to – vitamin deficiencies, thyroid imbalance, etc. can all increase susceptibility to stress.

- And if you think your stress is above normal, please seek professional help from a therapist, psychologist or doctor.

- Or if you’re having serious difficulties at work, consult HR or a career coach or even a therapist to discuss. Perhaps you could benefit from some coaching on how to have difficult or sensitive conversations.
Reviews & Takeaways

- Identify why you’re stressed
- Gauge your willingness to take action against the stress
- If you’re not sure what to do, focus on the basics: food, exercise and sleep
- Focus on small, incremental changes
- Focus on what you can and cannot control
- Seek professional help if needed
“Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.”

-Helen Keller
Thank you for your time and attention!
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