



## **Stress Management Building Your Resiliency**

**Presenter:**

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**Lesson #1**

Definition and causes of stress  
How stress affects your productivity

**Lesson #2**

Your body's stress response  
Costs and symptoms of stress

**Lesson #3**

Taking control to become more resilient  
Making changes in your feelings, attitudes and behaviors

**Lesson #4**

Making changes in your life style and habits  
Techniques to help manage stress

**Lesson #5**

Breathing exercises

**Lesson #6**

Progressive muscle relaxation

**Lesson #7**

Visualization exercise

**Objectives:**

- Define stress
- Identify the "costs" of your stress
- Recognize personal stressors and your responses to them
- Identify qualities for effective coping
- Learn strategies for increasing your resiliency
- Learn relaxation techniques (3)
- Feel more in control of your life!

**Stress is a part of life!** This means that we will experience joy and pleasurable moments as well as stressful moments. We can learn to manage stress so that our lives will be stimulating and challenging, but not overwhelming.

Stress is our physical, emotional and behavioral REACTION to any demand or change that we *believe* challenges our capacity to cope. Each person has different causes and reactions to what he or she perceives as stressful.

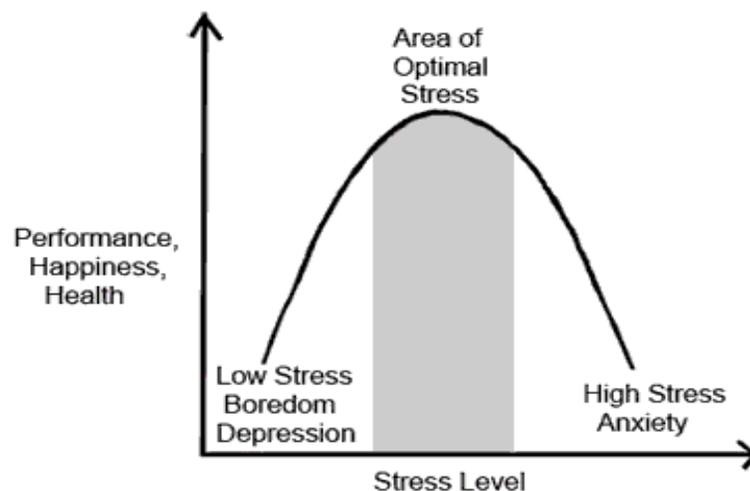
We can put the causes of stress into two categories.

- Major life changes - such as a change in living conditions or work, an illness, death in the family, starting or ending school, etc.
- Daily hassles - including relationships with others, money worries, raising children, job responsibilities, traffic and lack of time

List the causes of your stress here:

It's important to remember that we need some stress in our lives. Stress keeps us motivated and gives us the push we often need to finish a task or reach our goals. However, if we experience too much stress, our productivity decreases.

Put a check mark on the curve in the chart below to indicate where you feel you are right now with your stress level and productivity. Now, put an arrow on the curve to indicate where you think your optimal levels of stress and productivity would be.



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Stress Log

**Make copies of this stress log and fill it out every night before going to bed.**

What was your average level of stress today? (How you felt - on average - over the whole day, not just right now.) Put a mark on the line

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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No stress  
at all

Just a little  
stress

Some  
stress

A lot of  
stress

Very  
stressed

These were the things that caused me to feel stress today and the thoughts I had at the time (*list all the stressors you can think of*):

**Event:**

**Thoughts:**

## Lesson #2

When we experience a stressful event, or have on-going stress, our brain takes in that information and reacts to what it perceives as a threat. Our body produces chemicals to prepare us for a “fight or flight” or “tend and befriend” reaction. In other words, our body is wired for action!

- Heart pumps faster, arteries constrict and blood pressure increases
- Liver releases extra sugar and fat
- Chemicals clot blood faster
- Breathing becomes shallow and faster
- Digestive systems slows
- Vision and hearing become more acute
- Muscles tense, perspiration increases
- Physical pain is dulled

We pay a price for our stress, such as:

- Physical health problems
- Emotional health issues
- Behavior troubles
- Relationship difficulties
- Work problems
- Accelerated aging process

### **Stress takes away our ability to enjoy life or to feel good about who we are and what we do!**

Some people are simply predisposed to be stressed. This could be related to biological predispositions (the neurochemical setup that you're born with), but it could also be learned behaviors from your environment. Life experiences can alter your neurochemistry, especially when you experience bad things at a young age when your brain is still experiencing a lot of growth.

Those people who seem to thrive on stress and its associated adrenaline may have problems with their levels of dopamine or their dopamine receptors. As a result, the adrenaline rush increases their level of dopamine, which feels good.

How can stress be rewarding? There are some short-term benefits, such as thinking more clearly, an increase in energy and initial boost in immunity. There are some positive stressors, such as excitement over vacation, impending marriage or birth of a child. There can also be rewards associated with the stress itself (if you make a deadline, you may get a bonus.) Sometimes one type of stressor can help us avoid another. For example, some people involve themselves deeply in work stressors in order to avoid dealing with family problems or to distract them from other problems in their lives.

## Recognizing Your Symptoms of Stress

Use this check sheet to monitor your stress symptoms. We suggest you make copies of this worksheet and re-visit it about every two to three months. If your symptoms increase, identify the causes and turn to your stress management strategies to find additional ways to bring your stress under control.

Some symptoms may be the result of health conditions, so please seek medical care from your doctor.

### Physical

- Headaches
- Tension
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Weight change
- Colds, respiratory infections
- Appetite change
- Muscle aches (back, neck, etc.)
- Pounding heart
- Dry mouth, throat
- Sweaty hands, feet
- Rashes
- Upset stomach
- Heartburn
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

### Mental

- Forgetfulness
- Poor concentration
- Negative attitude
- Lethargy
- No new ideas
- Distrust of others
- Feeling of emptiness
- Loss of direction
- Hopelessness
- Unforgiving
- Cynical
- Continuous need to “prove” self

### Behavioral

- Poor eating habits
- Foot tapping, finger drumming
- Nail biting
- Grinding teeth
- Restlessness
- Accident prone
- Clenched hands
- Nervous laughing
- Lashing-out at others
- Lowered sex drive
- Nagging
- Fewer contacts with friends
- Increased drug, alcohol, tobacco use

### Emotional

- Anxious
- Frustrated
- Feel “down” frequently
- Mood swings
- Bad temper
- Nightmares
- Tearful
- Irritable
- Despondent
- Depressed
- Discouraged easily
- Worries
- Seldom joyful
- Constantly resentful
- Lonely

### Lesson #3

You can build your resiliency to stress. Check the resiliency qualities you have:

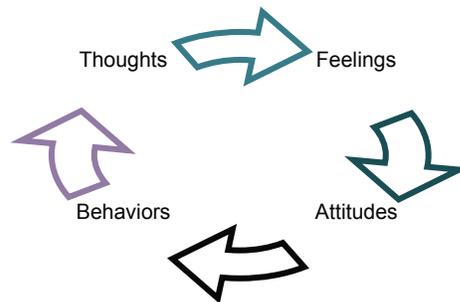
- I am flexible and adaptable
- I am able to bounce back during difficult times
- I am usually open to new ideas
- I can go “with the flow” when necessary
- I cope well with most challenges and changes
- I put things in proper perspective and don’t over react to stressors
- I have a sense of humor and am able to laugh at myself
- I have a wisdom that comes with experience

Goal for building resiliency:

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Chances are your stress is more about you and the choices you make than about something (or someone) else. You have control over your:

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Attitudes
- Behavior



How we think, feel and behave are all linked.

Things that make me happy: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### We can change our behavior by:

- Being aware of our feelings and attitudes about things that cause our stress
- Carefully choosing how we respond to stress
- Being positive and making positive choices
- Forgiving others if necessary
- Letting go of any anger, resentment, or negative feelings we have
- Getting help and support from friends, professionals, support groups, etc.

#### Find positive solutions to your problems by asking yourself critical questions:

- What is the value of this problem?
- Is there something to learn from this?
- Am I contributing to the problem? If so, how?
- What can I do to make things better?
- Is it worth it?
- If the problem is out of my control, do I need to move on?

Use this worksheet to brainstorm solutions to problems that are causing stress.

| <b>Problem</b> | <b>Ideas for solutions</b>       |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
|                | 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5.<br>6. |

## Lesson #4

### Three general ways you can manage stress:

1. Making a behavior change, for example:
  - Improving communication skills
  - Getting organized
  - Planning and prioritizing your time
  - Managing your money
2. Self Care
  - Mind
  - Body
3. Using stress reduction techniques, for example:
  - Massage
  - Yoga, meditation
  - Reading, journaling
  - Music, hobbies

### My roadblocks to making needed changes and taking care of myself:

- Technology minimizes my “down time”
- Workplace expectations and/or job demands are too much
- I don’t take the vacation days I have earned
- I have feelings of guilt and/or perceived selfishness
- My traditional role as care giver puts the needs of others before my needs
- I like my routines and am uncomfortable trying something new
- Too easy for me to use the excuse that I “don’t have the time”
- I have not made changes or self-care a high priority

### Taking care of yourself

- Eat right – limit sugar, fat, caffeine, and increase fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit your use of alcohol, don’t smoke.
- Sleep well - make changes to your evening habits and sleep environment.
- Exercise – release tension with physical movement.
- Know your limits, learn to say “no” if necessary, delegate to others, simplify.
- Have fun and take breaks – play releases tension.
- Learn something new – keep your mind young!
- Practice relaxation exercises (lessons 4, 5, and 6.)

What changes in your self-care could you make to help reduce your stress? Use the chart on the next page to write your goals and actions plans. Remember to start small. *For example, if you are going to begin an exercise program, start with 10 minutes every other day for the first two weeks, then add additional time until you built up to at least 30 minutes of exercise a day.*

|                                      | <b>My Goal</b> | <b>My Action Plan</b> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Eat right</b>                     |                |                       |
| <b>Limit alcohol, smoking</b>        |                |                       |
| <b>Get enough sleep</b>              |                |                       |
| <b>Exercise</b>                      |                |                       |
| <b>Know my limits</b>                |                |                       |
| <b>Learn something new</b>           |                |                       |
| <b>Have fun</b>                      |                |                       |
| <b>Breathing exercises</b>           |                |                       |
| <b>Progressive Muscle Relaxation</b> |                |                       |
| <b>Visualization</b>                 |                |                       |

### **Examples of techniques to help manage stress:**

|                                  |                        |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Massage                          | Meditation/yoga        |
| Heat                             | Music, relaxing sounds |
| Breathing exercises *            | Hobbies/distractions   |
| Medication                       | Social support         |
| Biofeedback                      | Spirituality           |
| Progressive Muscle Relaxation ** | Therapy                |
| Visualization ***                | Journaling/reading     |

### **Lesson #5 Breathing Exercises \***

- Breathing exercises are techniques to regulate your breath and help you to relax
- Breathe with your diaphragm (your belly should expand and contract)
- Use good posture to help you breathe more deeply
- Inhale slowly and deeply at a steady pace
- Get comfortable
- It helps if you can close your eyes

### **Lesson # 6 Progressive Muscle Relaxation \*\***

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation focuses on relaxing the major muscle groups in the body – one at a time
- Especially useful for anxiety, insomnia, headaches, backaches and high blood pressure
- Allows your body to release tension
- Use good breathing while tensing and relaxing your muscles

### **Lesson # 7 Visualizations \*\*\***

- Visualization is the use of thoughts to help you manage stress
- Thoughts can have an impact on your mood and behavior
- By taking the time to allow your mind to change it's thoughts, you can help your body relax and these more positive thoughts will improve your mood

### **Wrap up**

Try to commit to new strategies for coping with stress that you will practice every day.

Work to make changes in your life-style habits for improved health

Problem solve to reduce stressors where you can

Be positive!

Make a plan for yourself

Notes: