

21st Century Stress

Webster's definition of the word stress is strain or pressure. Strain and pressure taken internally affects the health and happiness of an individual. Stress is a natural part of everyday life. Left unchecked, however, stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders that can affect your health, vitality, peace of mind, and personal and professional relationships.

Everyone handles stress differently, some better than others. If you think you have too much stress in your life, it may be helpful to talk with a doctor, clergy member, or other caring professional. They may suggest that you consult with a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or other qualified counselor because reactions to stress can be a factor in depression, anxiety, and other mental and emotional disorders.

Checklist of negative reactions to stress and tension.

- Do minor problems and disappointments upset you excessively?
- Do the small pleasures of life fail to satisfy you?
- Are you unable to stop worrying?
- Do you experience flashes of anger over minor problems?
- Have you noticed a change in sleeping or eating patterns?
- Do you suffer from chronic pain, headaches, or back aches?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, consider the following suggestions for reducing or controlling success:

- Be realistic. If you feel overwhelmed by some activities, learn to say no!
- Shed the "superman/superwoman" urge. No one is perfect, so don't expect perfection from yourself or others.

- Meditate for ten to twenty minutes.
- Visualize how you can manage a stressful situation more successfully.
- Take one thing at a time. Prioritize your tasks and tackle each one successfully.
- Find a hobby that will give you a break from your worries.
- Live a healthy lifestyle with good nutrition, adequate rest, regular exercise, limited caffeine and alcohol, and balanced work and play.
- Share your feelings with family and friends. Don't try to cope alone.
- Give in occasionally. Be flexible.
- Go easy with criticism. You may be expecting too much.

National Mental Health Association, National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, (2001) *Mental Health Matters: Mental Health Month*.