



Influence Life and Health by Reducing Stress

Stress sets off a warning signal in the brain. The brain responds by preparing the body for defensive action. The nervous system is aroused. Hormones are released. A whole list of physical responses happen; they include:

Physical Responses to Stress

- Increased blood pressure
- Increased heart rate
- Increased breathing rate
- Increased blood sugar
- Increased carbon dioxide elimination
- Increased muscle tension
- Increased use of oxygen
- Pupils of the eyes dilate

Early Warning Signs of Stress	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Bowel problems • Difficulty concentration • Difficulty sleeping • Dissatisfaction with life • Disturbed relationships with others • Fatigue • Headaches • Irritability • Loss of appetite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low morale • Moodiness • Muscle tension • Nervousness • Pain • Short temper • Sleep disturbances • Stomach problems • Tension • Upset stomach

A little of this type of stress can be a terrific energizer and motivator! But, long term stress keeps the body in a constant state of readiness for "fight or flight." This causes tension. Long term tension increases wear and tear to all parts of the body. Stress has to be controlled to give the body a chance to recuperate and return to a more relaxed state. Here are some ideas.

Make time to

- Pamper yourself
- Get a massage
- Get a foot rub or pedicure
- Get a manicure
- Read a book or go to the library
- Learn relaxation techniques
- Take a bubble bath in candlelight
- Take a "time out" for yourself



Make plans

- Plan a vacation
- Plan an activity
- Plan a trip (once a day, week, month)
- Plan a community event
- Set a regular time to go to the movies with a friend or group

Get out and do something completely different

- Broaden your network of friends
- Pursue new hobbies or activities
- Try something you have never done before
- Learn something you know nothing about
- Go for a walk everyday and "smell the roses"
- Join a club (breakfast, dinner, social, cultural, spiritual, etc)

Get physically active

- Try a new sport
- Get really good at a sport you enjoy
- Join a league (such as bowling, golf, tennis, etc.)
- Try Tai Chi
- Start walking or walk more

For a little energy boost and a way to reduce stress, try some *deep* breathing.

Position: Get comfortable: Standing is better, but sitting is okay.

Precaution: Do not do quickly. Fast breathing could cause hyperventilation.

Purpose: Stress reduction, relaxation

Instruction:

1. Take a very SLOW, but deep breath.
2. Completely fill your lungs with this breath.
3. Hold it for a second or two.
4. Then slowly release this air.
5. Repeat this 3 or 4 times, or whenever you feel stress getting the better of you.