

SUCCESS IN LIVING

Following is a collection of stress management strategies which many professionals have found effective in controlling excessive stress in both the vocational and personal areas of their lives.

Diet. Not only does a nourishing diet help keep the body sufficiently fit to better resist stress, but current research is indicating direct links between the way we eat and the way we feel emotionally. **"We are what we eat"** becomes truer all the time.

Medical. Knowing the medical condition of your body and taking appropriate medical care of it is another way to avoid the weak physical links that are vulnerable to stress.

Exercise. Like the good diet, exercise affects not only overall body conditioning, but it also generates emotionally-positive hormonal production. Current research also indicates that regular exercise like jogging stimulates the body's production of anti-heart disease chemistry.

Relaxation Techniques. Many of the age-old stress reduction techniques -- yoga, meditation, self-hypnosis, et al -- are still very effective in our highly-stressed society, as well as bio-feedback techniques.

Social Support Systems. Humans are social animals, and we all need to have contact with our fellows in some mutually supportive way. The claim that "I can handle this by myself" often just leads to troubles on a larger scale.

Expand. Some of us have systems that are currently inadequate to share the thoughts, feelings, and actions that are part of our normal human behaviour. These need to be larger.

Utilise. Others of us have adequate systems, but fail to use them sufficiently. This not only can lead to atrophy of the system, but leaves us without the interpersonal feedback so essential to personal growth.

Time Management. Much of our stress comes from the feeling of 'too much to do in too little time'. Good time management skills can be very beneficial in reducing these stresses.

Rewards. These are 'payoffs', large and small, for jobs well done. We often acknowledge the difficulty of the task but fail to adequately reward ourselves. Rewards are normal, legitimate, appropriate results to tasks completed and tough roads traversed. Most of us would not deliberately short-change anyone else -- don't short-change yourself.

GTM'S (Good-To-Myself). These self-given gifts are not connected with any particular performance on your part, but are simply reminders that 1) you are

certainly as worthy a human being as most of the rest of us, and 2) as such, you deserve as many of the quality aspects of this life as anyone else. They needn't be much -- a long, hot soak, your own bouquet, that special wine -- but they are nurturing gestures that you give yourself.

Goal-Setting. It's hard to know where you are if you're not sure where you're going. Appropriate goal-setting leads to increased self-confidence, improved decision-making, and a greater sense of purpose -- all vital components of sound stress management.

Professional Community. Many organisations have discovered that deliberate efforts to build a sense of 'community' have paid great dividends in reduced on-the-job stress. Social activities, support groups, shared tasks -- all add to the sense of community.

Mental Health Time. Some time to call our own, to do things **we** want to do, can be a valuable addition to the balance between stress and reward. A warning: It is a lot easier to give yourself MHT in theory than it is to take it in fact, i.e. you will have to be as adamant about keeping this appointment with yourself as any business appointment you've ever made. You treat your body - don't be any less generous to your mental health.

Outside Activities. Research indicates that "stress reduces stress"; that is, an appropriate amount of stressful activities in one area helps reduce excessive stress in another: the sports car-racing surgeon, the sky-diving tax accountant, the rock-climbing executive. Activities outside our normal professional parameters that give us a sense of change, or accomplishment, or the opportunity to meet other people and talk of other things ... all these add to our sense of a healthy and stress-reduced life balance.

Change Career Path. Many people change career directions on the average of three times during our professional life-times. Career decisions made as adolescents or young adults need not be etched in stone, as needs, skills and relationships change. Just be certain that the lure of a new career direction is not just avoidance of unresolved stressors in the old one.

Professional Training. Some vocational stresses are the result of skills, knowledge, or experience that is inadequate to meet your job responsibilities. When this is the case, may be additional professional training is called for: workshops, courses, in-services.

Non-Professional Training. Ever want to take singing lessons, water-skiing instructions, flying lessons? Do it! The acquisition of new skills is not only a big boost to your self-concept, but it also adds that vital balance between the stressful aspects of your job and the rewarding aspects of both your job and your personal life.

Emotional Counselling Services. When push comes to shove emotionally, don't be any more reluctant to seek appropriate professional help than you expect those whom you professionally serve to seek out yours.

Career Counselling Services. Many of us spent far less time researching our career choices than we did complaining about the ultimate results of that choice. If a change in career path is looming, give it the attention it so richly deserves. The prevention of job related stress often begins with a wise choice of jobs in the first place.

Change Relationships. We usually choose our friends because they have much the same attitudes, skills, and behaviours that we do. If excessive stress has led to negative attitudes, playing "Ain't it awful?" with friends seldom helps. To help control distress, you'll need to learn to avoid negative energies - in whatever form you encounter them.

Life-Planning. To keep stress in perspective and maintain the necessary life balance, life planning is a core necessity. Values clarification, goal-setting, resource inventorying, support system-graphing ... all play their part in contributing to your overall sense of purpose and well-being.

