Managing Stress
Before It Manages You

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Employee Assistance Program
What is Stress?

• An automatic physical and emotional reaction in response to danger, to a demand, or to change.

• Any changes in your life can lead to stress. Such changes may range from divorce, to a change in job responsibilities, to holidays, or receiving a traffic ticket.
Positive vs. Negative Stress

• Stress can be **positive** It can help us perform at peak efficiency, assisting in increased focus, motivation, and overall performance. Some people work best under pressure.

• Stress can be **negative** if it is too intense, prolonged, or frequent.

• Don’t try to eliminate all stress. Instead, find your optimum stress level.
Fight-or-Flight Reaction
(or the body’s emergency response)

- This is an innate response to a perceived threat. It prepares us to fight or to run. The body is readied for action with increased heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, muscle tension, and perspiration.
“The fight or flight response is perfectly normal. Though, traditionally, the bride takes flight.”
Cortisol

• “The Stress Hormone”
  – Produced by the Adrenal Gland
  – Increases blood pressure
  – Increases blood sugar
  – Counter acts insulin
### High & Prolonged Levels of Cortisol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impaired Cognitive Performance</th>
<th>Suppressed Thyroid Function</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood sugar imbalances</td>
<td>Decreased Bone Density</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Blood Pressure</td>
<td>Increased Abdominal Fat</td>
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Symptoms of Stress

- fatigue
- insomnia
- depression
- anxiety
- frustration
- alcohol or drug abuse
- mood swings
- increased health problems
- Loss of sexual interest
- irritability
- poor appetite
- loss of concentration
- marital conflict
- helplessness
- loss of self-esteem
- social withdrawal
- inability to enjoy yourself
Costs of Stress

- Stress is linked to 6 leading causes of death in the USA
- 75-90% of all doctor visits are stress-related
- Americans spend billions each year to fight the symptoms of stress
Important Role of Control

- Less Perceived Control = More Stress
- More Perceived Control = Less Stress
- Rat in a Skinner Box
Lifestyle Choices for Effective Stress Management

Exercise

- Active physical exercise done regularly can help with handling stress, relieving tension, and reducing depression.
- Aerobic exercise is especially helpful, such as walking, jogging, swimming, bicycling.
Nutrition

• Foods can influence your ability to handle stress.
• Limit use of caffeine, sugar, sodium, and alcohol.
• Don’t skip meals.
• Avoid junk food (fatty, high caloric).
Lifestyle Approaches (continued)

Rest

- Get enough sleep at night.
- Take vacations.
- Enjoy your free time by putting worries aside.
- Fun is serious business.
Lifestyle Approaches (continued)

• **Develop a Support System**
  – Learn to talk about your feelings.
  – Rely on your friends, family, church, etc.

• **Develop outside interests**
  – Avoid becoming too wrapped up in one area of life (e.g., workaholic)
Change Your Stress-Producing Thinking

- **Stress** is created by your perception of events, not the events themselves.
- Focus on the positive aspects of the situation, maintain hope, and avoid setting unrealistic expectations.
Types of Stress-Producing Thinking

- **Catastrophising/Awfulizing**
  - It would be a terrible catastrophe if I don’t get what I want in this situation.

- **All-or-nothing Thinking**
  - I must be perfect in this situation or I am a total failure.

- **Fear of failure**
  - I might fail and get rejected. He may not like me if this were to happen.

- **Jumping to Conclusions**
  - I’m helpless. Forces beyond my control are causing me problems in this situation.
Developing Resiliency In the Face of Stress

- Adopt a positive attitude. Attend to pleasant situations. Say positive statements to yourself.
- Crises at work or at home can be seen as opportunities for growth and development. Setbacks can be seen as temporary and an occasion to re-evaluate your direction or goals.
- Accept that which you cannot change. Focus more on that over which you have control.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff!
Developing Resiliency (continued)

• Accept that change occurs constantly. Being flexible allows us to adapt.

• Hang around friends or coworkers who are positive and upbeat. Negative emotions are draining.

• **Humor!**

• Strive towards a healthy balance between work and home. Try to avoid stress in one arena carry over into the other.