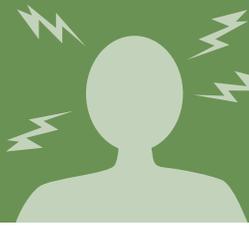


Managing in Tough Times



MANAGING STRESS WHEN CARING FOR YOUR FAMILY

Do you ever feel that you are stuck in a rut? Want to get off the all-work treadmill? You could be stressed!

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is your body's response to change. It is a very individual thing. What creates stress for you may not create stress for someone else. Not all stress is bad. Watching a toddler climb the steps of a slide can be stressful but also quite rewarding. Life would be very dull without some stress. The secret is to manage stress properly because unhealthy responses to stress can lead to health issues in some individuals.

It is important that individuals know when they are experiencing stress. Some stress is good. It helps us get tasks completed and react to our environment. Too much stress, however, can affect one's overall health.

Remember that it is not stress that causes problems; it is what you do when you are stressed that is important.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS:

- Physical: headaches, fatigue, weight change, digestive upsets, proneness to accidents, restlessness, insomnia, colds, pounding heart, teeth grinding, wakefulness, tightness of muscles, increased use of harmful substances
- Mental: forgetfulness, low productivity, negative attitude, lethargy, boredom
- Emotional: anxiety, mood swings, bad temper, irritability, depression

The causes of stress vary with the responsibilities and the personality of the person. There are, however, some common sources of stress a caregiver experiences.

STRESSORS:

- Multiple demands on your time, energy or money.
- Difference in expectations between your family, boss or yourself.
- Lack of understanding family members' mental or physical conditions.
- Difficulty meeting your family's physical or emotional needs.
- Pressure relating to financial decisions and the lack of resources.
- Disagreement or negative attitudes among family members.
- The feeling that family members aren't doing their share.
- Unrealistic demands and expectations of you by the family.
- Lack of open communication.
- Problems with children, marriage, employment or health.



ARE YOU EXPERIENCING STRESS?

Ask yourself the following questions. If you answer "frequently" to any of them, you may be suffering from stress.

- Do you get angry or irritable over little things?
- Are you too busy to eat?
- Do you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep?
- Are you unable to stop worrying?
- Do minor disappointments hinder your productivity?
- Are you anxious about the future?
- Do your hands tremble?
- Are you conscious of the beating of your heart?
- Is your stomach queasy?
- Do you suffer from dizzy spells?

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

Once you know the sources of stress, determine which ones you can do something about and which are beyond your control. Successful coping involves accepting what you can and cannot change.

Usually some action can be taken to decrease stress; changes do not need to be major to make an important difference. Sometimes letting go of unrealistic expectations or adjusting your standards of how frequently or how well you perform a task (such as housekeeping) will make a difference.

Professionals who have extensive experience addressing stress agree on five basic strategies to help control the destructive effects of stress. They are:

1. Plan, develop and set realistic goals and expectations.
2. Establish your limits.
3. Ask for and accept help from family, friends and professionals.
4. Take care of yourself emotionally and physically.
5. Identify and use community resources.

It is important to take time to renew yourself physically, spiritually, emotionally and/or mentally. Consider taking at least one "joy break" daily.

- Practice relaxation techniques. Tense and relax your whole body. Sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes. Starting at your forehead, tense the muscles and hold tightly, then concentrate on relaxing them completely. Repeat this as you move from your shoulders, and on to the chest, back, arms, legs, hands and feet. Feel the relaxation. You may also try meditation, yoga or tai chi.
- Eat, play, work and rest in response to your body's signals instead of a clock.
- Make time for hobbies and things that interests you.
- Begin your day by reading something enjoyable: a chapter in a favorite book, prayers or something inspirational and encouraging.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals and snacks.
- Call or visit a friend.
- Look for the good instead of the bad in all situations.

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