



## *Stress Management Techniques*

*I love the man that can smile in trouble that can gather strength from distress and grow brave by reflection. ---Thomas Paine*

### ***What is stress?***

Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that “demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.”

### ***What are sources of stress?***

- fear of the new, the unknown
- feelings of personal insecurity
- feelings of vulnerability
- fear of rejection
- need for approval
- lack of tolerance for ambiguity
- fear of conflict
- fear of taking a risk
- fear of developing trust
- fear of inability to cope with changed circumstances

### ***Why should we manage stress?***

#### *Fight-or-Flight*

Some of the early research on stress established the existence of the well-known “fight-or-flight” response. That showed that when an organism experiences a shock or perceives a threat, it quickly releases hormones that help it to survive.

In humans, as in other animals, these hormones help us to run faster and fight harder. They increase heart rate and blood pressure, delivering more oxygen and blood sugar to power important muscles. They increase sweating in an effort to cool these muscles, and help them stay efficient. They divert blood away from the skin to the core of our bodies, reducing blood loss if we are damaged. As well as this, these hormones focus our attention on the threat, to the exclusion of everything else. All of this significantly improves our ability to survive life-threatening events.

Not only life-threatening events trigger this reaction: We experience it almost any time we come across something unexpected or something that frustrates our goals. When the

threat is small, our response is small and we often do not notice it among the many other distractions of a stressful situation.

Unfortunately, this mobilization of the body for survival also has negative consequences. In this state, we are excitable, anxious, jumpy and irritable. This actually reduces our ability to work effectively with other people. With trembling and a pounding heart, we can find it difficult to execute precise, controlled skills. The intensity of our focus on survival interferes with our ability to make fine judgments by drawing information from many sources. We find ourselves more accident-prone and less able to make good decisions. In the long term we need to keep it under control to avoid problems of poor health and burnout.

### ***How to manage stress?***

There are very many proven skills that can be used to manage stress. That helps us to remain calm and effective in high pressure situations, and help us avoid the problems of long term stress. Below two skills on managing stress is included.

- *Imagery*
  - Sometimes we are not able to change our environment to manage stress – this may be the case where we do not have the power to change a situation, or where we are about to give an important performance. Imagery is a useful skill for relaxing in these situations
  - Imagery is a potent method of stress reduction, especially when combined with physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing. One common use of imagery in relaxation is to imagine a scene, place or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image with, for example, sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, etc. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.
  
- *Deep Breathing*
  - This is something that you can do for yourself by following these steps:
    - Sit quietly and comfortably.
    - Close your eyes.
    - Start by relaxing the muscles of your feet and work up your body relaxing muscles.
    - Focus your attention on your breathing.
    - Breathe in deeply and then let your breath out. Count your breaths, and say the number of the breath as you let it out (this gives you something to do with your mind, helping you to avoid distraction).