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## Effects of Stress

**Effects of Stress** What is stress Stress is a part of daily life. Everyone has stress. Some people appear to have more stress than others. Stress is one way we react to specific events in our life. There are times when you might feel that too much is happening at once and feel overwhelmed. Other times, you feel the pressure of time or a deadline and realize you need to take care of something before it is too late. Having been in a similar situation before will create anxiety. How we perceive a situation will effect how we respond to it. There is good stress and bad stress. Good stress can be a motivator. Knowing that you have an obligation to address and a timeframe. That type of stressor puts you into action in order to meet a deadline. Or you might be in an unexpected situation where you need to make a split second response in order to avoid danger. This could be slamming your foot on the brake to avoid an accident. Anticipation of a competition or performance will cause tension and nervousness prior to the event. This nervousness is due to an increased flow of adrenaline going through your body. Your body is preparing for the “fight or flight” syndrome. The release of adrenaline prepares your body to take the steps to deal with the situation, including improved focus, strength, stamina and heightened alertness. People also have bad stress in their lives. Whether we perceive a situation as being stressful or not depends on previous experiences. One person might see being in a multi tasking job as very stressful, feeling overwhelmed and becoming anxious about their work. Another person might find multi tasking enjoyable because they continue to stay busy and time goes by faster. Your body is capable of dealing with stress for short periods of time. When the stress is ongoing i.e. dealing with a divorce or bankruptcy, this can wear a person down. Long term stress contributes to feeling tired, overwhelmed and contributes to lowered immunity. The body’s reactions to stress Once you view something as being stressful, whether positive or negative, your body reacts to that perception. The response is a survival technique and a defense mechanism. The reaction is referred to as the “fight or flight” response. Either you are going to fight the attacker or you will choose to flee from the threat. This includes increased heart rate and blood pressure, perspiration, hearing and vision become more acute and hands and feet might become colder since blood is being directed to larger muscles in preparation for a fight or to flee. Your body is being prepped to handle the situation. When the threat is over, your body will return to normal. If your body has difficulty returning to normal, then you would experience stress overload. This is when you stress out too much or have ongoing stress in your life and never get a chance to relax. Pressure in your life might be too intense or go on for too long without a break. People that have experienced trauma are likely to have stress overload. If trauma is not resolved then you might become hypervigilant, a sense of being overly aware of possible danger. You might always be “on guard.” Stress overload has an emotional and physical effect on the body. This could include panic attacks, depression, sleep problems, physical pain i.e. headaches and allergies as well as abuse of alcohol or other drugs. Having unresolved trauma will effect your perception. Situations that might not have caused tension prior to the trauma can have the ability to create anxiety after the trauma. Becoming aware of how your perception has changed and seeking support to address the trauma issue can be helpful to reduce ongoing stressors and to reduce anxiety. Seeking counseling that focuses on cognitive perceptions will help to decrease hypervigilance and will help to reduce the likelihood of continuing to be retraumatized. In addition, your body has memory of the event as well. Being able to release that reaction to the memory of the event from your body will help to reduce stress overload and triggers. Stress and control Stress is contributed to the desire to be in control. This not only includes control over yourself, but control over other people and your environment. Trying to control others and your environment, however, is impossible. You only have control over your own thoughts and actions. In order to relieve stress and anxiety it is important to let go of trying to control things outside of yourself. We are unable to foresee the future and cannot control what events will happen next. Focusing on future potential problems contributes to anxiety. On the other hand, people are able to prepare for things that might occur and have a plan of how you would like to respond to events. This could be as simple as having a repair kit in your car for getting a flat tire or preparation for an interview and the questions that might be asked during the interview process. Part of living life is that things always change. Change is normal. How you perceive something will impact how you react to it. This is where the fight or flight reaction occurs. You can decide to be proactive and address the situation. Making a choice to take care of things when they occur. Or you can expend a lot of energy avoiding issues and letting them build. Taking action will actually help to reduce stress and anxiety in the long run. In addition, there will be a feeling of empowerment as you begin to deal with problems as they arise. Trust your intuition and creatively think of all ways you could resolve the issue at hand. Even if you try to tackle a problem and don’t succeed, you could then view this as a temporary setback. Review what happened and try to approach it differently. Setbacks can be temporary. Find who your friends are and develop a support system. Another option is to seek counseling in order to have someone that is impartial as part of your support system. You don’t have to always take care of problems by yourself. Ask your friends, counselor or other support persons what they think about a situation. They might have ideas that you would not think of on your own. Learning to address problems as they occur will help you to change your perception of things from problems to challenges. Doing so will continue to help you build your sense of self esteem and empowerment. Identifying challenges as they occur, developing a plan to deal with the challenge, asking others for their point of view, taking action and keeping focus on the goal you are working toward will help to strengthen your resiliency. Steps to reduce stress Each one of us is a unique individual and we all have different experiences throughout our lives that affect our perception. What might be a stressful event for one person, might not be viewed as stressful for someone else. In addition, some activities are more stressful than others. Self care including eating well and getting enough sleep are important for stress reduction. Making time for doing activities that are relaxing is preventative to reducing stress overload. Relaxation is important, but there is no one right way to relax. Some people find that sleeping or going to the beach is relaxing. Others choose to be involved in an enjoyable activity or hobby as a way of relaxing. The goal is to find an activity that allows you to escape from everyday worries and problems. There is no right way to do that. Relieving stress can be done by meditation, exercise or doing an activity. Making the time to care for yourself is a priority that helps to reduce stress overload. As you focus on making positive change in your life that will help to reduce stress and anxiety, be forgiving of yourself if you don’t resolve your problems immediately. Being critical of yourself is very easy to do, especially when people close to you have been critical of you for a long period of time. That critical voice can be very loud when you don’t get it right the first time. A suggestion is a positive response to the changes you are trying to make and to be forgiving of yourself when things don’t go perfectly as planned. These are some suggestions that might work or to come up with your own. □ “As things develop, I will, through listening to guidance from my unconscious, adapt to changing circumstances and grow with them.” □ “I may not get what I want when I want it; I trust that

things will work out in their own good time, for my ultimate benefit, as long as I remain calm and peaceful.” □ “I may not get what I want at all, and yet, in remaining calm and attentive, I may discover something else that I need even more than what I thought I wanted.” How you perceive a situation will affect how you respond. Whether you choose to address the issue or to avoid it. If you have a negative perception then you are more likely to experience anxiety and not be able to effectively take care of the problem. This will then reinforce that you have no control over the outcome and reinforce the perception of being helpless. On the other hand, a positive perception will help you to find a way to deal with the challenge you are presented with. If you choose to take responsibility for your feelings and actions then you are more likely to have a positive outcome. This will reinforce the sense of resiliency and empowerment. Breaking old patterns of behavior is difficult, especially when trying to do it by yourself. Being willing to look at yourself and to identify changes you would like to make takes a lot of energy and time. The more effort you put into making a positive lifestyle change, the greater the feeling of accomplishment you will experience. Develop a support system, whether family, friends or a counselor. Having someone that helps you to make positive change will increase the likelihood that the change will be long term instead of temporary.

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