



DR. CHERYL WINTER

VITAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS

Stress Management



Stress is an integral part of everyday living. While stress by itself is not inherently a negative experience, prolonged stress can be quite harmful to the immune system, the adrenals, and the heart. Each individual's reaction to the same stressor can be positive or negative.

Some common negative ways of coping with stress are: overeating, smoking, and alcohol or drug abuse. Hopefully, you have found more positive ways to deal with the stress in your life: exercise, meditation, breathing exercises, improving time management, healthy diet, and improving the quality of the important relationships in your life.

Exercise – A regular exercise program helps to generate a greater sense of well-being, accompanied by increased energy, improved sleep, and improved coping skills. A cardiovascular program, yoga, tai chi, or daily walking are all examples of the many types of exercise that may help you to de-stress your life. See the handout on exercise for ideas on starting an exercise program.

Meditation & Peace & Quiet – It is very difficult to calm the mind and the body during stress unless you have developed some helpful relaxation techniques, such as meditation, breathing, or prayer. Only 5 minutes daily are needed to start improving your reaction to stress. A very helpful paperback book by Joan Borysenko, *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*, might be a good way to start a meditation program. There are hundreds of other books that may also be helpful. The important thing is to develop a program that works for you, perhaps every morning for 5 minutes before you shower. Breathing exercises can accompany meditation or be a stand-alone stress-reduction technique. Peace and quiet is not a common thing these days. When you are feeling stressed, close yourself off from all outside distractions and noise for a few minutes. This will help your mind focus and bring down your stress level.

Music is Medicine: While enjoying peace and quiet are very important, the healing powers of music cannot be ignored. Find the genre that makes you feel good and heals you. One of my favorite types of music to listen to is classical and piano. The music of Aaron Kaplan is phenomenal. His work is utilized by medical and mental health professionals and can be heard in hospitals and healing centers. Check out his website at: <http://www.aaronkaplan.com>.

Life Issues & Preparation – Improving time management by prioritizing and organizing your daily responsibilities will decrease the total stress load. Improving your communication skills in your important family or job-related relationships can improve the quality of your life by decreasing your total stress load. Avoid procrastination (no matter how tempting), which always results in stress. You can cut out stressing over being unprepared by being prepared every time!

Have a Giggle – Laughter is the best medicine, and that holds true for relieving anxiety, as well. No time to watch a movie: head on over to YouTube and watch one of their hilarious videos. Search for some old “I Love Lucy” or “Johnny Carson” or “Carol Burnett” footage. Those were the good times!

Clean Up – A cluttered, dirty environment is usually hard to work in and can cause stress/anxiety. Take ten minutes to put some things away and de-clutter your space.

Lather Up – It’s no secret that a hot bath or shower helps relax the body, but it also helps put the mind at ease. You have to bathe anyways, might as well relax while you do.

Write It Out – Thoughts can get stuck in your head and cause you to obsess, overthink, and become stressed. Try writing or typing your thoughts out. Getting them out and on paper can help put things in perspective and stop overthinking.

Hobbies Help – Not everything in life will make you happy, but you should have plenty of things that do! Find a hobby that you really enjoy like dance, painting, or playing an instrument. As long as it’s a positive influence and puts a smile on your face, you can’t go wrong!

Perspective is Key – When something is stressing you out, stop and think about how big or small that something really is. Are you stressed because you have a final tomorrow or because you didn’t wear matching socks today?

Go Somewhere COMPLETELY New – Stress can come on just by being in a stressful place. By going somewhere completely new you can choose to make that a positive, stress free place for you. Visiting nature, such as a park, a forest, a lake can be very peaceful and stress-free.

Healthy Diet – Many common foods and beverages do not support your body during periods of stress, whether small or large. Eating high-quality, nutrient-dense foods enables you to deal with stress in a more positive way. It is most important to restrict intake of refined sugars and starches, caffeine, alcohol, and known allergic foods. Unrefined whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, essential fats, and quality proteins that are low in saturated fat are all part of a healthy, nutrient-dense dietary program.

Live in the Now – You can’t always disregard the past and future, but sometimes you need to stop thinking about what could, will, did, should happen and focus on the “is” happening.

Prolonged stress may lead to exhaustion of your adrenal glands, which play a critical role in helping you to deal with stress. Adrenal exhaustion becomes a vicious cycle that includes depression, fatigue, feelings of anxiety, and lowered resistance to illness. It is in your best interest to prevent adrenal exhaustion from occurring by developing healthy stress-management techniques.

