

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:  
Innovative Psychological Consultants*

## Description

Stress is something everybody deals with in their lives at all times. Our ability to manage the stressors will likely be reflected in our overall mood and state of being. Stress can be defined as the body's physical, mental, and emotional reaction to demands placed on it. Stress occurs when pressure is greater than resources ( $S = P > R$ ). When trying to balance this equation we want to reduce and eliminate pressure (stressors) and/or increase coping resources to accommodate higher levels of stress. There are several different types of stressors. Negative stressors drain us of our energy. Positive stressors such as hiking a mountain or taking a vacation can challenge and energize us. There are situational stressors that are short lived and there are prolonged stressors that endure.

## Symptoms & Features

Everyone experiences stress in different ways. There are some common places it shows up. Physical symptoms: sleep disturbance, weight gain or loss, low energy, muscle tension, insomnia, headaches, indigestion or other GI distress. Cognitive symptoms: poor concentration, poor memory, confusion, ruminating, uncertainty, indecision, intrusive thoughts, poor problem solving or decision making. Emotional symptoms: fear, impatience, guilt, denial, anxiety, depression, irritability, apprehension, anger, panic, or feeling overwhelmed. Behavioral symptoms: increased alcohol or drug use to cope or escape, change in communication style, fidgetiness, isolation, social withdrawal, or impulsive and reckless choices.

When people experience pressure in the form of stress that is greater than their coping resources for extended periods of time, they are much more prone to depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, or substance abuse. Part of reducing stress is recognizing where it comes from. It can be worthwhile to inventory your stressors and assess what can be reduced or eliminated. If they cannot be immediately resolved, then it is important to develop a plan to reduce or eliminate the stressors over time. Having a plan to ultimately resolve your stress can automatically reduce stress. Common sources of stress include: being over worked, having a lack of support, financial problems, medical issues, conflict with children, sexual dysfunction, relationship discord, or legal problems.

## Treatment

There are countless ways to manage stress and the best way is specific to the types of stressors and the person. If you are struggling to develop strategies for resolving and managing stress you are advised to seek the help of a clinician at I.P.C. who can assist with the inventory of stressors and development of a plan to address those stressors. Some common strategies include changing your perception and reaction to stressors such as changing beliefs from "it's the end of the world" to "this will be a tough challenge". We can improve time management skills so we can get more done. We can learn to say "No", as we don't need to take on additional stressors if we are currently overwhelmed. A great way to manage and endure stress is to develop a self-care plan to counterbalance the stress. When dealing with prolonged stressors, the name of the game is endurance and stamina. Getting support from friends and family as well as taking breaks and engaging in activities that recharge you are critical. Asking for help might clear your plate of stress, so long as you can put pride aside and not feel like you are burdening others.

## What Can I Do To Help Myself

Once you get your stress balanced, work hard to not let it sneak up on you again. Maintain the progress you achieve by continuously monitoring and keeping stress balanced. Yo-yo dieting gets depressing over time and the same is true of the up and down of finding yourself overwhelmed yet again. Avoid temporary stress relievers like caffeine, nicotine, alcohol or drugs. Don't ignore stress, procrastinate, blame others, beat yourself up or get lost in self-pity.