

Stress

Have a Plan for Managing Stress

Sure, it would be nice to take a month off at the beach to relax. But for most of us that's not possible. Stress is a part of everyday modern life. So what do we do when the pressures of work, family life and finances begin to add up?

First, it's important to learn how to identify the signs of stress. When in a stressful situation, you may show signs of physical symptoms. These can include headaches, rapid heartbeat or muscle tension. You may also notice emotional effects like irritability, restlessness or depression. Over time these can seriously affect your health.

Once you recognize a potentially harmful level of stress, you can start using specific techniques to manage it. In this *Your Source* issue, we take a look at stress and what you can do about it. We examine:

- The impact of stress on families, and how to engage your children in shaping a healthier home environment.
- Ways in which stress can harm your relationship, and how you and your partner can team up to manage it.
- Tips for taking care of yourself so you can better handle life's challenges.

Go online today! Log on to access *Stress* under the Library/In the Spotlight section. The site includes a range of self-assessments and educational resources such as live or on-demand webinars, along with videos. These can help you learn to manage stress better!

Cut Stress as a Family

About three-fourths of parents say that family responsibilities are a major source of their stress. At the same time, only a small percentage of youth say their parents' stress does *not* bother them. Children often learn the behaviors they see in their parents. So, it helps to respond to stress in a healthy way.

- **Keep the dialogue open.** Take time each day to ask your children what's going on in their lives. Show your understanding, and help solve problems.
- **Cool off after work.** Instead of unloading on your family when you get home, take a few minutes alone to unwind and release the stress of the workday.
- **Have family meals together whenever possible.** It's a great time to catch up on each other's experiences.
- **Treat everyone with respect.** Take a few minutes to step back and calm down if there's a crisis. Be patient—not unnecessarily critical—and offer support to each family member.

- **Preserve small moments of togetherness.** Simple moments together—cooking, chores, outdoor activities, shopping or bedtime story reading—can help your family stay connected and resilient.

Handling Stress in a Relationship

No relationship is immune from the effects of stress. Job strain, money concerns and busy schedules can all take their toll. However, couples can learn to work together to respond to stress in healthier ways.

When Stress Sneaks In

Stress is a common part of life and sometimes we don't recognize its effects on us. Perhaps you observe mood changes in your partner, or you see your partner turning to food, alcohol or drugs to deal with current pressures. Regardless of its origin, stress can cause people to have misdirected anger, resulting in arguments or becoming withdrawn from one another. Unchecked, stress can harm every aspect of our health and well-being.

Communication is Key

One of the best antidotes to stress is communication. Take time to ask questions and truly listen to your partner. Good communication shows each partner that they are understood and cared for. Allowing your partner to share the burdens he or she may be carrying can help defuse tension. Your fresh perspective on things may help your partner find solutions. If your partner can trust you as a source of comfort and problem solving, you'll be ready to jointly handle challenging situations when they arise.

Encourage Each Other

When times are tough one of the best things you can do is to express confidence in your partner. This can help uplift and enable him or her to feel strong enough to face the current challenges. A positive word and attitude can be contagious!

Seek Help if Needed

If the symptoms of stress are interfering with your relationships, it is important to seek diagnosis and treatment through your doctor or a mental health professional. Your program offers resources to help you deal with life's challenges.

Now That's An Idea!

Tips for Good Stress Management

Keep your diet healthy and well-balanced. Try not to fall back on “comfort” eating with junk food (high in fat, sugar and salt) to ease your stress.

Make sure to get enough sleep. Make a plan to get in bed earlier if fatigue is adding to your stress.

Work out of the grip of stress. Follow a regular exercise routine that you can enjoy and sustain.

Don't lean on substances. Find ways to deal with stress other than using alcohol, nicotine or recreational drugs.

Learn an easy relaxation technique. This could be deep breathing, guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, tai chi, or meditation.

Pursue an interesting hobby. Direct some of your free time to an active hobby such as playing music, gardening, dancing or crafting.