

Combating Stress

by Malkanthi Leitan



Stress affects all of us and if allowed to go unchecked can result in life-threatening ness and serious, emotional problems.

Stress is an inevitable by-product of a modern lifestyle-a condition that affects the mind, body and spirit. It is estimated that around eighty percent of all ill nesses are stress-related. These range from the common cold and flu to more serious problems such as irritable bowel syndrome, heart attacks and even some cancers. Apart from the risk to our physical health, stress affects us emotionally too, resulting in mood swings, depression and at its worst, a nervous breakdown.

Stress-related health problems probably cost the nation millions of rupees each year through staff absenteeism, resulting in loss of productivity, although no surveys have been done in this regard as yet.

Paradoxically, the more we learn about stress, its dangers and its effects on our health, the more complex our lifestyles become. All of us usually end up merely “coping” with stress rather than actually dealing with it.

Men, who guard their emotions suffer an enormous amount of stress but women, too, are under pressure to keep up with the new “Superwoman” stereotype- supermum, superwife, superlover and so on.

To merely “cope” with stress is dangerous and potentially disastrous. Suppressed tensions and emotions do not go away but will eventually manifest themselves as health problems. It is vital that we learn to be healthy and happy by recognising stress, the effect it is having on our lives, and dealing with it.

Listen to your body. Our bodies have their own remarkable systems of health checks and balances. Ignoring the clear signals that are there for us to acknowledge and act upon will add to stress levels.

Timetables and deadlines especially can be the cause of stress in office but if you carefully balance these and build time for yourself into your schedule they can actually have the opposite effect. Take time out to make a list of those not-so-nice necessities. These mean paying the bills, writing to your bank manager or confronting a colleague or employee at work. Focus on the larger, more complex problems and break them into more easily managed, less complex chunks, before dealing with them. Schedule them, get them over and done with and then pat yourself on the back. You will find yourself getting more stressed-out if you worry about these things than if you actually make yourself do them on time. Work out your priorities and do not try to do everything at once. Talk your problems over with someone else if you can, and at work, make sure you delegate.

The same goes for the pleasurable things that you keep wanting to do but somehow never got round to such as arranging to meet up with an old friend, going to see a play, taking a holiday or just spending time alone. Make sure that you give yourself time and space to work all these things out. Make them your priority. A planned, relaxed and long weekend for instance, can do wonders for you and put everything

into perspective.

Do Not:

- override feelings of tiredness and endeavour to push on with the aid of artificial stimulants such as coffee, sugar-rich food, alcohol or tobacco-Do take a rest!

- ignore the strong urge to go to the toilet thinking “I haven’t got time for that”.

- skip meals, use stimulants or ignore hunger-Do take time out to have a balanced meal. Eat seated and slowly.

- leave less time to sleep than you know you want or need.

- work through lunchbreaks – Do take a rest or a walk or meet a friend for lunch.

- ignore thirst. Always do keep bottles of drinking water handy so that you are not tempted to drink caffeine or sugar-laden drinks.

- ignore aches and pain – Do try to get them checked out, go for a massage, take a relaxing shower or bath at the end of the day and get plenty of sleep.

- work through colds and flu’s, dosing yourself with medicines. Your body is screaming for attention. Take a day off and do not allow your body to get run-down. A great stress-buster is to get physical. Touching and caressing are great stress relievers and if you cannot round up anyone to give you a hug, go for a massage or similar hands-on therapy-or get a pet.