

FOREVER ACTIVE

PERSONALIZED FITNESS AND WELLNESS FOR MEN 50+



Stress

Introduction

Stress: it is everywhere, at home, at work, at play. It can slowly and insidiously kill us but we can't live productively without it. For the majority of the population, stress is negative but the reality is that successful, happy people have learned to use stress to their benefit. Corporate CEO's, neurosurgeons, elite athletes have learned to channel the stress they are under to perform at a highly proficient level. They embrace and control the stress they encounter rather than letting the stress dominate and affect them emotionally and physically in a negative way. What is stress? Why are some people better at controlling the stress they are under than others? What are the emotional and physical consequences of not handling stress in an appropriate way? What techniques can you use to make "stress" a productive rather than a destructive force in your life? These are the questions and issues we will examine in this newsletter and it is hoped that when you are finished you will have gained a new understanding of stress, the good, the bad and the ugly.

Did You Know

Stress Busters

1. Maintain an optimistic but realistic outlook.
2. Confront your fears, waiting just increases your anxiety.
3. Rely on your inner moral compass to guide your thoughts words and actions
4. Identify and imitate healthy role models
5. Commit to physical fitness
6. Learn to make decisions, solve problems and be flexible

What is Stress

Dr. Hans Selye, an endocrinologist at McGill University in Montreal, was the first to give a scientific explanation for biological stress. He developed his stress model, named "**General Adaptation Syndrome**" (GAS) based on physiology and psychobiology. In a nut shell, his model states that when an event or stressor occurs, whether it is perceived as positive stress (**Eustress**) such as a wedding or negative stress (**Distress**) such as a funeral, it leads to a three stage body (hormonal/neurologic) adaptation response;

Stage 1- Alarm -Body reacts with "fight-or-flight" response and sympathetic nervous system is activated. Hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin released into the bloodstream to deal with the stressor.

Stage 2- Resistance -Parasympathetic nervous system returns many physiological functions to normal but blood glucose levels remain high and cortisol and adrenalin continue to circulate at elevated levels. The outward appearance of the person seems normal but they are experiencing an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, breathing.

Stage 3- Exhaustion -If the stressor continues beyond the body's capacity to deal effectively with it (ie chronic stressor, good or bad), the bodies physiologic resources become exhausted and the person becomes susceptible to disease and death.

The purpose of the adaptation process is to return the body to the state of **homeostasis** (steady healthy state within the body). If the person's coping mechanisms are not effective in managing and returning the body's internal environment to homeostasis the person's emotional and physiological health becomes compromised and sickness, such as diabetes, stomach ulcers and heart disease occurs.

Successfully Dealing with Stress

The ability to cope with stress involves a set of skills and habits that most people can acquire according to the authors of *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*.

Based on their research, your **Social Network** is the most important factor is helping you cope and navigate through stressful situations. Interestingly, there is now evidence that giving social support (ie- volunteering) may be a greater buffer against the negative effects of stress than receiving support.

Being disciplined in your daily activities, and both aerobic (running, swimming, walking) and muscular resistance (lifting weights) **exercise** can enhance your ability to cope with stress.

Pessimism weakens your ability to cope with stress. Utilizing **realistic optimism** is an effective stress coping technique. This technique involves seeing as much of the negative as a pessimist but knowing how to disengage and not dwell on it. **Stress inoculation** is also an effective stress coping strategy. This involves intentionally exposing yourself to the stressor that is producing your stress. You approach the stressor in the same way you engage in physical activity, by slowly ratcheting your exposure to the stressor in a way that it does not overwhelm you. You learn to adapt to the stressor in bit size pieces. It is important to note that physical, emotional and intellectual growth occurs primarily when you are outside your comfort zone.

Research has also shown that a high percentage of stress resilient people call upon their **religious and spiritual beliefs** during times of real adversity.

Laughter has also been shown to reduce the level of stress one is experiencing. It is believed that laughing results in mood enhancing endorphins to be released. These chemicals are often associated with a "runners high."

Lastly, **imitating a role model** who has shown an ability to cope successfully with stressful situations is recommended. Breaking down what they do into segments that you can turn into rules for yourself is an effective technique to cope with stress that you are experiencing.

Summary

Coping with stress is tough but doable by learning and utilizing the above techniques. It is also important to note that **adequate sleep** and **proper nutrition** are important components in dealing with stress appropriately.

Exercise and Stress

Stress can cause both physical problems such as weight gain, tight muscles and chronic muscle and joint pain, metabolic problems such as diabetes and emotional problems such as depression. Improving your level of physical fitness can play an important role in your ability to manage and cope with stress.

Types of Exercise

Virtually any form of exercise, from high energy aerobics (running, cycling, swimming, walking) to yoga, Tia chi, and stretching to recreational activities like bowling, curling and golf can act as a stress reliever. Whether you are an athlete or downright out of shape, you can still make a little exercise go a long way toward stress management.

Benefits of Exercise

1. Increase your metabolism for weight control and improved energy through out the day.
2. Increases the blood flow throughout the body to help eliminate waste products and to deliver oxygen and nutrients for body growth and repair
3. Helps in the production and release of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters called endorphins.
4. Increases self-confidence and improved sleeping habits which is often associated with mild depression and anxiety.

Key Points When Planning to Begin Exercising

1. Start slow and gradually increase the amount and intensity of your workout.
2. Make exercising a priority by following a regular schedule. Try to exercise 3 to 4 times per week and exercising on the same days and at the same times each week. This will help your exercise routine become a habit forming behaviour.
3. The body will adapt to exercise so you need to keep changing what you are doing if you want to see progressive results.
4. Your program should have a balance of cardiovascular, muscular strength and flexibility exercises.
5. Make sure you schedule in adequate rest days. Recovery days are just as important as exercise days.
6. Follow the 80:20 rule. Don't expect perfection. Each time you exercise will not be a "gold medal" performance. Enjoy the time you are spending exercising and if you happen to have a poor session or miss a day, don't worry about it, don't try to make up for it, just move on to the next session