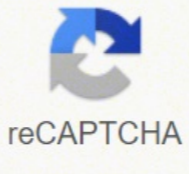




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How to cope with emotional suffering

Photo Courtesy: [Jose Luis Pelaez Inc/DigitalVision/Getty Images] Stress is a normal biological and psychological response to events that threaten your body or mind. The threatening “danger” varies for each individual; it can range from a negative remark from another person to a looming deadline for a project to a move to an unfamiliar city. In these cases, your body switches into “fight-or-flight mode” — which is also commonly referred to as “survival mode” — to prepare you to tackle the issue at hand. In response to stress, your body secretes appropriate hormones to deal with the increased stress level. However, if your stress becomes chronic, it may be harmful to your body and mind. Fortunately, there are many ways you can alleviate or prevent stress. Because acute stress is almost unavoidable in our everyday lives, it’s essential to seek methods to reduce stress before it becomes chronic. Simple lifestyle and diet changes can significantly mitigate chronic stress and its long-term adverse effects. If you choose to undergo any form of treatment, it’s best to seek a medical professional’s advice first, particularly if you feel like your stress levels have become unmanageable. Generally, there are two types of stress: eustress, which is “good” stress, and distress, which is “bad” stress. Eustress can feel like the cathartic experience after a workout at the gym or the thrill of a roller coaster ride. Rather than negatively impacting your body, eustress may make you feel more energized. On the other hand, distress is the type of stress that most people seek solutions for, as it usually undermines their mental and physical health. Stress can also be acute or chronic. While acute stress is normal and almost unavoidable, chronic stress is a type you’ll want to work to prevent. Not only can chronic distress significantly lower your quality of life, but it can also pave the road for harmful medical conditions to develop in the future. For example, constant exposure to chronic stress may lead to depression, obesity and even cancer. Eustress Eustress can be helpful and beneficial to an individual. It allows a person to fully explore and maximize their potential. Eustress prepares a person physically, emotionally and cognitively for the strength they need to tackle whatever is about to happen. Eustress is triggered by the body’s fight-or-flight response and by blood pressure and heart rate increases. Levels of dopamine and oxytocin, which are also known as “feel good” hormones, increase during periods of eustress. This allows people to physiologically gain a sense of well-being from eustress. One example of eustress is the strength and excitement an athlete feels right before playing, and these feelings ultimately help the athlete perform well. The feeling is similar to that of an adrenaline rush, but it usually happens through an event’s duration. Another example of eustress can be the inspirational “flow” that artists and creatives experience while producing their work. Distress On the other hand, distress can be harmful to an individual. Although distress is also triggered by the body’s fight-or-flight response, it leads to negative symptoms. During this time, blood pressure, heart rate and “emergency” hormones — such as cortisol and adrenaline — increase. Because these hormones are inflammatory, the long-term production of and exposure to both can be harmful to the body. Chronic Distress If you feel distress for a long period of time, it can strongly impact your health and well-being. Examples of chronic stress include constantly moving, changing new jobs or working at a highly demanding job. Chronic distress is more difficult to recognize because it’s often easily integrated into lifestyles. Usually, this type of stress compromises someone’s lifestyle by causing fatigue, forgetfulness, depression or even adverse physical conditions. Be sure to look out for stress warning signs and symptoms and seek professional help if necessary. Chronic stress, if left untreated, has been shown to lead to severe medical conditions that can, in the worst cases, become deadly. Studies have shown that conditions such as stroke, heart attacks, obesity and aneurysms correlate with chronic distress. Since a person’s body will constantly produce cortisol and adrenaline when they’re under chronic stress, other significant hormonal problems may also occur later in their life. Hypertension and severe cases of depression can also result from untreated chronic distress. Acute Stress Acute distress is usually more recognizable than chronic distress. Most commonly known as “survival stress,” acute distress can occur during incidents like a car accident or period of extreme fear. As long as acute stress episodes aren’t constant and don’t turn into chronic distress, a person’s body can usually recover fully from the adverse effects of acute stress. Causes of Stress Everyone responds to stress indicators differently, both psychologically and biologically. Below are some of the more common causes of stress. Workplace One of the biggest causes of stress for a lot of people is the workplace. People who hold extremely demanding jobs around the clock are most prone to developing stress. In times of increased responsibility and pressure, such as layoffs, high turnover rates or the pressure to learn new technology, stress is bound to increase. Other factors, such as workplace harassment, unreasonably demanding bosses and co-workers, long hours or inter-office gossip, can also elevate stress. The occasional performance appraisal can also be the cause of stress. School Similarly, for children and young adults, school can become a contributor to stress formation. Deadlines, projects and exams can become daunting. For some children, the pressure to do well in school can also be stressful. As teenagers reach puberty, other social issues — such as fitting in with peers, going through puberty, dealing with body image changes and enduring social bullying — can become additional stress sources. Financial Financial issues are another common cause of stress for many people and tie indirectly to work-related stress. People who are deep in financial debt or who have multiple loans and payments tend to be more stressed. Worrying about paying bills, keeping a steady income source and maintaining a certain lifestyle can all be common causes of stress. Relationships Problems in relationships can also create stress, whether it’s familial, romantic or social. Marriage, family expectations, raising children, chores and sibling rivalries can generate stress. Moreover, relationship problems, unplanned pregnancies, fear and unreasonable expectations are common relationship sources of stress. Symptoms of Stress During times of stress, the body produces the “emergency” fight-or-flight hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Primatively, these hormones help a person’s body react appropriately to hostile environments that may otherwise threaten their physical or mental well-being. Cortisol and adrenaline usually: Dilate the pupilsIncrease heart activityRaise blood pressurePrepare a person’s body and mind to overcome obstacles While this reaction is natural and can be considered beneficial in small doses, changes in society put some individuals constantly under chronic stress. This also means that their bodies are constantly producing these fight-or-flight hormones, which are primitive and intended only for life-threatening cases. In the long run, the overproduction of cortisol and adrenaline can influence a person’s body in cognitive, behavioral, psychological and physiological ways. Cognitive Cognitive stress symptoms and warning signs appear when stress impacts someone’s mind. These symptoms may include, but are not limited to, the following: Increases in forgetfulness or problems with memoryIncreased difficulty in concentrating or focusingPoor judgment and decision-makingPessimistic outlookAnxietyRacing thoughtsConstant worrying Emotional Emotional symptoms and warning signs appear when stress affects a person psychologically. They may include, but are not limited to, the following: Increased mood swingsIrritationShorter tempers and increased agitationInability to relaxConstant feelings of being overwhelmedA new sense of loneliness and isolationGeneral unhappiness or even depression Physical Physical symptoms and warning signs are usually indicators that stress is negatively impacting a person’s body physically They may include, but are not limited to, the following: Skin inflammation Development of pain Diarrhea or constipation Increased nausea and/or dizziness Chest pains and increased blood pressure Decrease in libido Frequent colds Behavioral Behavioral symptoms and warning signs are usually indicators that stress could be impacting a person’s daily routine and the way they typically do things. They may include, but are not limited to, the following: Change in eating habitsChange in sleeping habits — either too much sleep, too little sleep or none at all (insomnia)Isolation from other human interactionProcrastination or neglect of duties and responsibilitiesDependency on alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relaxDevelopment of nervous habits, such as excessive pacing, nail-biting or scratching Either way, all these symptoms and warning signs can seriously lower a person’s quality of life. Also, studies have shown that cortisol and adrenaline also reduce immune system functioning and put people at a higher risk for developing infections and other medical conditions. Internal body inflammation can also exacerbate allergies, such as asthma and skin rashes, and abnormal bowel problems and diseases, such as Crohn’s disease. People who are under constant stress are more likely to have elevated blood pressure. This hypertension, in turn, is often considered a predecessor to cardiovascular problems and stroke, a life-threatening condition. Because stress is an endocrine response, the overproduction of cortisol and adrenaline can also lead to hormonal imbalances. It’s essential to seek a medical professional or a psychologist’s opinion if you’re experiencing a few or many of these warning signs. If left untreated, chronic stress can become a precedent for numerous deadly diseases later in life. Sometimes the symptoms of anxiety are caused by other psychological or medical problems, and fixing these existing troubles may, in turn, help alleviate stress and increase your quality of life. Treatment Options for Stress As mentioned, chronic stress places individuals at high risk for developing severe and potentially deadly medical conditions in the future. Studies show that stress has been linked to cancer, suicide and depression. That’s why it’s vital to find ways to relieve stress or try to reduce your exposure to chronic stress. While acute stress is ever-present in our everyday lives and almost impossible to completely eliminate, it’s not as harmful as chronic stress. Ideally, everyone should utilize preventive methods to keep acute stress from turning into chronic stress. Usually, stress management is the key to both the prevention and treatment of chronic distress. Below are several standard methods you can use to treat existing chronic stress. If you practice these methods regularly, they may be effective in eliminating acute stress and preventing chronic stress. Exercise Studies have shown that physical exercise can help relieve distress, both physically and mentally. Although eustress is created during physical exercise, it’s the “good” type of stress that can leave you rejuvenated and energized. Generally, medical professionals recommend 30 minutes of light walking per day as the minimal amount of exercise that can help control stress. Physical exercise can be a robust preventative measure against chronic distress, as long as you engage in it on a regular schedule. Diet Diet alterations are another way to possibly treat and prevent chronic stress. Increased intake of omega fatty acids — the “healthy fats” found in salmon, tuna and mackerel — has been shown to alleviate stress and protect the heart and arteries from stress risk factors. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables can also help decrease the inflammatory properties of cortisol and adrenaline within your body. Similarly, eating foods high in antioxidants can help strengthen your immune system and tissues by eliminating free radicals. Dark chocolate, which is also full of antioxidants, can even be a stress-relieving food due to its calming effects. Lifestyle Minor alterations in lifestyle choices can also relieve and prevent stress. Engaging in a hobby you love can provide stress relief. People who have strong social circles or families are also less prone to develop chronic stress due to the robust emotional and psychological support systems they can call upon. While controversial, studies also show that sex is a great outlet for stress. But, importantly, maintaining a positive mindset is the most effective treatment and prevention method against chronic stress. Therapy Sometimes, doctors may prescribe psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy as treatments for stress. These types of therapies, which typically involve meeting with professional therapists, often focus on the patient’s mind and psyche so that they can perceive the causes of their stress in a way that gradually causes less and less stress. One example of such therapy is musical or paint therapy. Everyone responds to stress differently and at different degrees, so you may need to find your stress-relief method through trial and error. There’s a wide range of stress-management methods, so it can be helpful to talk to a medical professional to learn more and to get help treating and preventing episodes of chronic stress. Stress can not only cause health issues but also worsen existing conditions. Please talk to your doctor if you think any symptoms you’re experiencing are the result of stress. It’s essential to receive a diagnosis to ensure another health condition isn’t at the root of your symptoms. Some typical stress signs include: Increased anxietyA new feeling of depressionFatigueHeadachesHigh blood pressureInsomniaShortness of breath While stress is an unavoidable factor in our daily lives, it’s still possible to alleviate and prevent negative impacts of chronic stress. You can even use stress to beat stress. Increase your eustress, and you can dissipate your distress. Go on a short walk with a friend today to alleviate stress, or seek a healthcare professional’s opinion if you suspect that stress has negatively impacted your quality of life. Resource Links: MORE FROM SYMPTOMFIND.COM

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