

**Stress.....Stress...Stress...Stress...**

**Stress... and more..... Stress.....**

*Choose*  
**HEALTH!**



It seems like everywhere we go we hear about stress, see examples of stress or experience stress ourselves. There are many definitions of stress but it can be most easily thought of as wear and tear on our bodies. Stressors are things, either real or imagined, that excite our mind and body. Stress is a part of our everyday lives and can be positive or negative. It is how we interpret the stress that makes it good or bad for us. Each of us sees the same situation in a different way. Good stress makes us happy and inspired. Falling in love is an example. Bad stress has just the opposite effect and not only makes us unhappy but also can become a factor in the development of many different illnesses. Heart disease, high blood pressure, headache, digestive problems, and the common cold are just a few of the illnesses that have been linked to stress. Research has suggested that 70 to 80 per cent of all diseases may be stress-related!

Our bodies are marvelous machines that tell us when something is wrong, if we only listen. Symptoms of stress are often vague and overlooked. Here is a list of symptoms that can signal stress has become a problem that needs addressed:

- **Muscle tension**-clenched fists, poor posture, tight shoulders, neck pain, frowning and grimacing.
- **Mental**-trouble sleeping, forgetfulness, accidents, ineffective work output.
- **Physical**-rash, indigestion, sweaty palms, tiredness, heart palpitations, loss of sexual desire.
- **Behavioral/emotional**- complaining, blaming others for mistakes, anger and hostility, excessive smoking or alcohol use, excessive gum chewing, meal gulping, crying, nervous actions such as nail biting, toe or finger tapping, knee bouncing or rocking motions, talking quickly or finishing sentences for others.

Healthy habits help our bodies manage stress. Here is a short list of suggestions to get you started.

- **Exercise regularly**- Physical activity is one of the best ways to deal with stress. It is the natural way to burn off the stress response. Get some form of physical activity at least 20-30 minutes on most days of the week.
- **Eat a balanced diet**- A well-nourished body can best tolerate the effects of stress. Include at least 5 fruits and vegetables in your diet every day. Drink 4-8 glasses of water daily. Steer away from coffee, tea, and chocolate that contain caffeine, a stimulant.



- **Practice time management skills-** Use your time wisely and learn to say no. Try not to put things off. Ask others for help. Set goals you can realistically achieve. Make time for yourself and those people and things that are relaxing and renew your outlook on life.
- **Learn relaxation techniques-** Get into the habit of using deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or a form of meditation or mental imagery daily. Get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
- **Look for the positive in every situation-** We cannot control everything that happens to us but we can control how we react. Learn to take deep a few deep breaths or count to ten when you are starting to feel overwhelmed. At the end of each day, write down five things with which you were blessed.
- **Laugh everyday-** Don't take yourself too seriously. Include humor into your life daily but never at the expense of another's feelings.
- **Do not be afraid to seek professional help-** Talk with your healthcare provider about your stress and symptoms. They will counsel you on treatment or can refer you to a specialist if needed.

To learn more about stress management and healthy living,  
please call OSF Saint Francis RiverPlex at 282-1624.

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