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## ***INFO SHEET*** **What is Stress?**

Stress is a feeling of being under too much pressure due to circumstances or thoughts. Stress is increasingly becoming a major risk factor for many chronic conditions for millions of people. Stress is also a physical reaction triggering our body with specific reactions when we interpret or that we “perceive” as a danger to us. This group of physical changes is referred to as “fight or flight” response to prepare us to face an immediate danger. These cause our body to respond with a series of changes, that include increased blood pressure, heart rate and muscle tension. Most of our hormonal systems are involved. Our adrenals react with additional cortisol and continue so until for many of us at the point of exhaustion. Though most stressors are not the result of physical threats, our body still reacts that way. A continuous stress response eventually cause harm, from immunity problems to cardiovascular issues to cholesterol challenges to obesity, nutritional deficiencies, arthritis, diabetes, and even worse systemic inflammation. To protect ourselves we either need to eliminate stressors in our life or learn to manage our reaction so not to trigger a fight- flight response or to return our body to “safety”.

Changing our reaction to prevent a physical response may not be a skill we were taught at a young age. No matter the age, it is a skill that using many strategies that will work for you and needs to be accomplished sooner, rather than later. All ways to do this can be learned effectively but will require time, effort, and patience. The results you are looking for include, relaxed muscles, lower heart rate/blood pressure, calmer thoughts, improved focus, less anxiety, feeling in control, emotional balance and perhaps feelings of accomplishment. It becomes a balancing act between your nervous system. One part of our nervous system is called the parasympathetic system, and its function is helping our bodies relax, rest, and remain balanced until the current stressor has passed. The sympathetic nervous system functions to trigger the fight-or-flight response to protect us from real danger that could be present. Unfortunately for many of us the sympathetic nervous gets stuck on high by our thoughts and behaviors.

### **Where Does Stress Come From?**

#### **External and Internal Stress**

External stressors abound. Work and family responsibilities are high on the list of external stressors. Even when nothing may be wrong there are usually too many things going on that seem

overwhelming. Taking care of ourselves seems to be at the end of the to-do list that we never get to. There are things required that we deal with from finances to, illnesses, to social events that have many stressors lurking within. They are out there just waiting to collide with ones that are within us.

Sometimes our internal stressors can be even more harmful. Negative thoughts about ourselves including low self-esteem and low self-competence are major stressors that complicate the external events we may be trying to manage. Lacking compassion for others as well as our own perfectionism can impact us. Chronic physical pain sets our body up for a reaction along with any emotional imbalances due to anxiety or depression. It a jungle “out-there as well as in-here”.

The negative effects of continuous stress to our bodies result in many chronic conditions. Some of the main ones include, depression, anxiety, insomnia, lack of libido, pain, migraines, cardiovascular problems, hair loss. obesity, vulnerability to infections and illnesses. All which will add even more stress to our bodies.

### **What Can We Do About Stress?**

#### **Physically Relax Your Body**

##### **Breathing**

Not everyone is able to relax, even when they say they are relaxing. Most of us reach for something artificial to soothe us like a cup of tea/coffee, some sugary goodie or, alcohol. These may offer a quick fix, occasionally but taken regularly they usually become unhealthy crutches that do more harm.

Taking a step back from the situation and practicing breathing exercises can be the quick fix you might try at any time in any place. Just a few minutes of deep breathing can release the stress in your muscles and help clear your mind of the racing thoughts that have triggered the stress response.

After a stressful day at work many take a half hour to soak in a bath or sauna or take a shower and freshen up while they assess the stressor from a different perspective.... while continuing to breath

##### **Move Your Body**

Exercise can do much to help your body relax. It burns off the excess energy and releases it from your body. It doesn't need to be strenuous; it can be just moving like walking, or even pacing. Yoga movements, dance movements, most any movement will help with high stress levels. Here again adding peep breathing, singing, or even talking with a friend while exercising can shift the ruminating thoughts away just long enough to shut down the triggered stress reaction.

##### **Other Self-Care Activities**

Any kind of self-care that works for you even temporarily, will be helpful. Reading and escaping the issue for a little while may be just what you need. Or getting your thoughts out by writing them down

and express them if there is no companion to listen to you. There's always a good dose of positive self-talk that can offer a more realistic viewpoint of the situation you are dealing with. Anything that can calm the body will be beneficial for the steps you may need to take with your mind. And of course, a great stand-by for many is nap! Falling asleep for even 10 minutes is refreshing for many. Rest your body. Stay rested for as long as you can. That is how the stress reaction will be turned off...or now.

### **Mentally Relax Your Body**

If you have been able to rest and reset your body reaction, working through the problem (original stress) will be much easier and more productive. A tired body will not help the mind function efficiently.

**Mindfulness** is not the same as meditation, but both can be helpful in calming your thoughts. Mindfulness brings you into the present moment with your thoughts. Meditation also is a practice of mindfulness with breathing and concentration on detaching from the thoughts remaining in your mind. Mindfulness is a way to manage thoughts, even if stressful. Mindfulness offers focus and being physically grounded with present circumstances. Both however help with stressors and mindful meditation can reveal opportunities as well.

**Balancing Feelings** We've mentioned in a previous chapter how expressing feeling assertively is a positive way to respond. Every stressor may carry several feelings that you need to process to bring your mind and body to rest. Your feelings aren't right or wrong. They just are...real. If you are unable to respond directly to someone or something that triggered the stressor, you will need to do so by yourself. Stuffing the feeling won't work and neither will be exploding with anger. Both of those responses will have a negative effect upon your body and will heighten the impact. Assertively sharing your feeling regarding the situation will go a long way to help you calm down. Even if the only person who is listening is you. If you are overwhelmed at work due to someone else not acting responsibly, that feeling anger or annoyance has to be lifted from your body, to help yourself change or accept the situation without physically harming yourself. You may be surprised at how compassionate an internal listener you have.

**Discriminate** between fact and fantasy. Another mind relaxing strategy may be a discussion between fact or storytelling. Is your worry or concern something that has been provoked internally by you without a factual basis? For instance, if you don't get everything done your boss' schedule then you think you'll lose your job! When in fact stretching the deadline may not even be an issue. Remember your boss may be stressed too, and not realistic with timelines. You are not expected to carry someone else's burdens, too. You are expected to do your best and when you feel you have, your body will agree with you.

**Change Your Behaviors** Speak your opinion on the reality of list of things to do before you start. Make it clear even to yourself, that you'll work through the tasks as quickly as you can without stressing. Being busy and moving on tasks even those set by you is not the same as being stressed at every item that pops up.

**Stop "Multitasking"** Stop believing that you can multitask effectively. You may be able to juggle many balls but the one that gets the focus is the one in front of your eyes while the others are circling in the air (or resting on the back burner) Juggling is not multitasking. It's a focusing skill. Moving from one task to another while waiting for information is not multitasking. Your brain manages one thing at a time without stress. Chaos is stressful!

**Prioritize, organize, and prepare** for circumstances that can become overwhelming. These are efficiency skills. They can be learned if you are operating in an environment that can take you out of your comfort zone.

**Setting Boundaries** Learn to set boundaries and delegate. Those who don't get stuck with the longest and toughest to-do-list. Expect others, especially at home, to pitch in and do their share. They are part of the team. Do the same with work team members when appropriate. You don't need to be a superman/woman. And if you do then it's an internal issue for you to resolve.

**Stop Judging Yourself** If you only feel worthy if you expect to accomplish the impossible then again this is an internal affair for you to rectify.

**Create A Solution** When your body and mind are brought back within balance after a stressor is triggered you just may be able to find a better a solution to your eliminate the stressor. During the initial phase it's all a reaction, rightfully so or not.

**Make Changes** If you are constantly under stress with everything something must change before it's too late for you to keep your body healthy. Other than the stress of a family crisis, loss, or illness nothing else is worth sacrificing your well-being,

**Ask for Help** There are many people who would be willing to help you out in a tough spot. One of the beauties of being human is that we share so many more likenesses than differences. You are among the masses who struggle with stress. Reach out!

**For more information or to schedule your free consultation with Lynda contact 239-330-441, [lynda@lifestylecarecoach.com](mailto:lynda@lifestylecarecoach.com) or visit [www.lifestylecarecoach.com](http://www.lifestylecarecoach.com)**