

# Stress Management Strategies



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GI for Kids



# What is Stress?

## ■ Processive stressors

- Those that elicit what is called the “fight or flight” reaction. When we believe we are in danger, the pituitary gland automatically sounds an alarm by releasing a burst of “stress hormones” adrenaline and cortisol.
- These hormones are actually a safeguard that help us focus on the situation at hand, speed up reaction times, and temporarily boost our physical strength and agility while we decide whether to retreat or stand firm.



# What is Stress?

## ■ Systemic stressors

- Our bodies' automatic physiological responses to stress, such as the loss of equilibrium (dizziness) that you feel before you faint or the release of acid that turns and churns your stomach during a stressful situation.
- Systemic stressors may be released simultaneously along with processive stressors and can cause even more stress as they create a greater sensation of danger to your well-being.



# Levels of Stress

- Acute stress
- Episodic acute
- Chronic



# Acute stress

- Acute stress is a temporary type of stress we feel in an emergency (i.e., when we step back to the curb out of the path of an oncoming vehicle or our team wins the Superbowl)
- This type of stress is the most manageable. Our heart rates jump, blood pressures raise, tension headaches may ensue, we become momentarily angry, elated, boisterous, or resentful. We cry in joy, in relief, in frustration. The moment passes and we go on about our business.



# Episodic acute stress

- Occurs when life's situations get the best of us, when Murphy's Law seems to be the rule of the day.
  - When life spins out of control with one disaster after another—an illness, a divorce, and loss of employment within a short time span.
  - Symptoms like recurring headaches, indigestion, fatigue, and insomnia are vivid warning signs of episodic acute stress.
  - We can avoid episodic acute stress by recognizing its warning signs and coping with stressful situations as they occur. Without attention, this level of stress can lead to chronic stress.




# Chronic stress

- This stress wears us out, grinding us down until our bodies and minds react with serious long-term physical and/or mental disorders.
- Chronic stress occurs when situations become impossible to deal with, when there's "no way out" and we give up trying to overcome adversity.
- Maladaptive behavior frequently develop in response to chronic stress.



# Signs of Stress in Children

- Often kids' stress is internalized and most noticeable in physical symptoms such as frequent flu-like symptoms including headache, stomachache, and even nausea.
- Children under stress may regress to behaviors like bedwetting, clinginess, and frequent crying.
- Changes in sleep and appetite
- Changes in social activities
- Dropping grades



The build up of stress can cause headaches, digestive problems, eating disorders, insomnia, fatigue, and lower our resistance to other illnesses like colds and flu.



**How can I manage stress?**



# Take a Deep Breath and Count to Ten

- Taking a deep breath or two adds oxygen to your system, which almost instantly helps you relax. Start with “take a deep breath” and...
  - Count to ten (or more or less as the situation warrants!)
  - Stand up and stretch. Remember relaxation is the opposite of stress.
  - Take a short walk. If you’re at school, take a bathroom break or get a glass of water.
  - Stand up and smile. Try it! You’ll feel better!
  - Do something that changes your focus. When you come back to the problem, chances are it won’t seem nearly as insurmountable.



# Slow Down to Smell the Roses

- **Take the time.** Schedule time for fun and/or relaxation everyday. Start a new hobby or pick up something you have set aside for a while.
- **Sleep on it.** Every coin has two sides and every issue has both pros and cons. List them both then put the list away and take a second look tomorrow. Sometimes “sleeping on” a situation changes the minuses to pluses.
- **Every cloud has a silver lining.** After all, rain makes things grow! Try to see the upside of an otherwise challenging situation



# Set Boundaries for Yourself and Others

- Knowing yourself and your limits may be the most important way to manage stress effectively.
  - **Dare to say no.** One more little thing may be the “straw that breaks the camel’s back”. It’s okay to say “No”, “I can’t”, or “Later”.
  - **Forgive yourself.** Sometimes events really are out of control and you really are “Not Guilty”. Quit blaming yourself.
  - **It’s OK to be selfish.** Take care of your own needs first. No one knows better what you need than you do. If you don’t do it for yourself, no one else will either.



# Family Stress Management

- Be clear in setting rules and consistent with discipline
- Be a good listener
- Tolerate mistakes without criticism
- Work as a team
- Eat meals together
- Plan family activities



# Other Tips

- Get a good night's rest.
- Eat healthily.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Exercise, participate in a sport or engage in fun activity.
- Plan out your time and prioritize.
- Talk to a friend about your problems, don't hold it in.
- Take a nap.
- Take a warm bath.
- Read a book or watch TV.

# Stress Reduction Kit



**Bang  
Head  
Here**

Directions:

1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
4. If unconscious, cease stress reduction activity.