Stress

Did you know that your body speaks to you in a language that you can understand if you listen? Just stop what you’re doing and take one or two minutes to sit or stand still and listen to your body.

As you listen ask your-self these questions:

* Am I feeling stressed? Listen to your head, neck, chest, abdomen and the lower limbs and notice what kind of feelings are being reflected to your mind from the body.

* Am I feeling depressed?

* Am I getting angry easily?

* Am I having troubled sleep (lack of sleep or sleeping excessively)?

* Am I feeling overstretched?

Developed by: Staff Stress Counseling Office - United Nations Office at Nairobi
* Am I feeling restless and unable to relax?

* Am I anxious?

* Am I feeling afraid or threatened?

* Is my heart pounding to an extent that that I am aware of the heart beats?

* Is my head feeling too heavy to carry?

* Is my concentration level getting lower and lower?

* Am I feeling depleted of all energy and struggling to do what I have always done with ease?

These and many more feelings could be an indication that your body needs attention. We do not have immunity against stress; however, we can do something about stress! The Staff Stress Counselor can offer useful tips on how to deal with stress.

Stress is a natural, human response or reaction to a real or perceived challenge, demand, threat or a change to which we must adapt. People understand stress in different ways.

A situation, which is exciting and stimulating to one person, may be perceived by another person as extremely stressful. How we perceive and respond to our everyday events determines the degree of distress. While stress in small amount can help keep us motivated, cumulative stress can be detrimental to our physical and mental well-being.

**Signs and Symptoms of Stress include:**

Feeling anxious, irritable, tearful, angry, lonely, overwhelmed and fearful; Physically tired, lethargic, sweaty, breathless, tense, experiencing headaches, weight change (gain or loss); Acting irrationally, erratically (sleeping, eating), unable to manage time well and seeking “comfort” habits. All signs and symptoms of stress have the potential to harm your health, emotional well-being, relationship with others and general work related performance.

Note: The symptoms of stress are numerous and they differ from one person to another, hence the above list is not exhaustive. Visiting the staff counselor may help address your specific signs and symptoms of stress

**What Causes Stress?**

Stress can be caused by many factors: stressful work environment, family conflicts, uncomfortable residential area, one’s irresponsible behavior, negative attitudes and feelings, unrealistic expectations, mental illness, distressing chronic and terminal illnesses, unemployment, family break ups (divorce and separation) and unexpected sudden change in one’s life. There are many causes of stress and what might make one person stressed might make another person merry.

**Tips on Reducing Stress**

1. **Exercise:** Regular exercise will help reduce stress. 20-30 minutes of a physical activity a day will help your...
2. **Create a stress free environment**: An environment that is as stress-free as possible at home and at the work place can help reduce your stress levels. You can *create an empowerment zone*, a retreat for yourself to reenergize yourself both mentally and emotionally. This is achievable as it can be a private room at home, your office desk and a comfortable chair. Include items such as plants, books, pictures and relaxing music to create a peaceful environment. Use this area to think and visualize positive things in your life or for carrying important tasks whenever possible.

3. **Eliminate stress from the moment you wake up in the morning**: Your day is set from the moment you wake up in the morning and it’s tone is determined by the things that you begin with e.g. a harsh alarm sound, a non-pleasant breakfast and any other unhappy beginning such as being caught up in a traffic jam.

4. **Share your feelings**: Whether you have had a bad day in the office or a sick family member to take care of, talking with a friend can help you to remember that you aren't alone. Don't forget to stay in touch with your friends and family. Refusing to talk about your problems can keep you overwhelmed.

5. **Work according to your strength**: Try and maintain a balance between your rest and work, this will preserve your health.

6. **Take adequate sleep**: Sleep is regarded as one of the best methods of combating stress. It allows the mind and the body to rejuvenate. For an average person eight to ten hours of uninterrupted sleep is good. In case you do experience sleep disturbances of any kind it is advisable to see a counselor or a doctor. They will assess your sleep pattern and advice you accordingly.

7. **Take proper diet**: For effective stress management proper diet is very essential.

8. **Meditate**: This is the opposite of the fight or flight mechanism. It is a deep state of restful awareness that counters stress. A daily practice of about 20 minutes helps to remain calm in a stressful situation.

9. **Improve your time management skills**: Lose the clutter or rid yourself of all the clutter that surrounds you through proper time management so that you can prioritize what stuff is important and what isn’t. This will not only make your immediate working space more visually pleasing and relaxing, but will help avoid the stress of incessant search for important items among the excess.

**Steps to Moving Out of Stress**

**Step 1: Recognition**: Recognize that your stress level is unhealthy.

**Step 2: Take care of yourself**: Make changes to your lifestyle ensuring that you are taking care of your physical needs – healthy eating and sleeping habits, plus taking exercise.

**Step 3: Get enough rest**: Even when work demands your personal attention, set limits. You perform better when you are not fatigued.

**Step 4: Manage time effectively**: Set targets and goals that are realistic and achievable, prioritize clearly and
reward yourself for a completed task

**Step 5: Challenge thinking patterns that induce stress:** "You may reframe" your situations and reappraise them. Defective thinking is a fertile ground for incubating stress.

**Step 6: Talk through your concerns:** Sharing your concerns with a trusted friend, family member or work colleague may offer some relieve. A problem shared is half - solved.

**Step 7: Maintain healthy support networks:** Unhealthy support networks can aggravate stress levels instead of helping to reduce it.

**Step 8: Take relaxation and breathing exercises:** This is an effective way of managing stress (see staff counselor for training on how to carry out relaxation and breathing exercises).

**Step 9: Quiet Time (QT):** Meditate, pray, listen to music, and focus on the positive aspects, and the beauty that is always a part of life.

**Getting Support:**

The UN Counseling Service is available for all United Nations staff members and their families.

**Note:** Medical support and information on medication is available at JMS, do not result to over the counter drugs for self-medication in the process of handling symptoms of stress.

Where can I go for further information and assistance? Contact:

**UNited Nations Joint Medical Service**

**Staff Counseling Service**

**Block G - Room 120**

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