

Early Warning Signs of Stress

The stress reactions below are presented in categories so that they may be more easily recognized and understood. There is no magic number of the symptoms that suggest difficulty in coping. Rather it is the extent to which the noted reaction is a change (different from a person's normal condition) that makes a reaction potentially important. Further, it is the combined presence of symptoms that determines the degree of the problem. Indicators may be isolated reactions or combinations among the three categories listed below. Finally, it is their duration (how long the symptoms have been present/how long they last), the frequency of such incidents (how often they happen) and the intensity (strength) with which they are present that suggests the severity of the difficulty in coping.

Indicators of Difficulty in Coping

Emotional	Behavioral	Physical
Apathy The "blahs" Recreation no longer pleasurable Sad	Withdrawal (smoking avoidance) Social isolation Work related withdrawal Reluctance to accept responsibilities Neglecting responsibilities	Preoccupation with illness (intolerant of/dwelling on minor ailments) Frequent illness (actually sick)
Anxiety Restless Agitated Insecure Feeling of worthlessness	Acting Out Alcohol abuse Gambling Spending spree Promiscuity	Use of self medication Physical exhaustion Immune system suppression
Irritability Overly sensitive Defensive Arrogant/argumentative Insubordinate/hostile	Desperate Acting Out (getting attention-cry for help)	Somatic (Body) Indicators Headache Insomnia Initial insomnia Recurrent awakening Early morning rising
Mental Fatigue Preoccupied Difficulty concentrating Inflexible	Administrative Infractions Tardy to work Poor appearance Poor personal hygiene Accident prone	Change in Appetite Weight gain Weight loss (more serious) Indigestion Nausea Vomiting Diarrhea Constipation Sexual difficulties
Overcompensation (denial) Exaggerate/Grandiose Overworks to exhaustion Denies Problems/Symptoms Suspicious/Paranoid	Legal Infractions Indebtedness Shoplifting Traffic tickets Fights Child/spouse abuse	

Deep Breathing Exercise

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Take 3 deep cleansing breaths.
3. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
4. Try to breathe so that only your stomach rises and falls.
 - a. As you inhale, concentrate on your chest remaining relatively still while your stomach rises. It may be helpful to imagine that your pants are too big and you need to push your stomach out to hold them up.
 - b. When exhaling, allow your stomach to fall in and the air to fully escape.
5. Take some deep breaths, concentrating on only moving your stomach.
6. Return to regular breathing, continuing to breathe so that only your stomach moves. Focus on an easy, regular breathing pattern.

Note: It is normal for this healthy breathing to feel a little awkward at first. With practice, it will become more natural to you.

The CALM Reminder

Chest: Breathing slower and deeper
Arms: Shoulders sag
Legs: Loose and flexible
Mouth: Jaw drop

Cue-Controlled Relaxation

Cue-controlled relaxation is a very quick and easy relaxation technique. Set up a cue to remind you to relax.

1. There are two different types of cues (reminders):
 - External Cue (reminder) (e.g., when your watch alarm sounds; when you see a note on your desk; at traffic lights, etc.)
 - Internal Cue (reminder) (e.g., when your muscles reach a certain tension level, when you feel a headache coming on)

Note: It's very important that once you set up a cue, that you actually do the relaxation exercise when the cue comes up. Eventually it will become a healthy habit!

2. Relax by doing the following
 - a. Take a deep, easy breath
 - b. Exhale s l o w l y...
 - c. Say a word to yourself as you exhale (e.g., "relax" or "calm")
 - d. As you exhale, focus on letting your muscles relax. As an option (if it's convenient), you can close your eyes too

Disputation: Challenging Upsetting Thinking

Examine your thoughts for key words:

1. must, need, got to, have to, should (unrealistic standards)
2. never, always, completely, totally, all everything, everyone (predictions / labeling)
3. awful, terrible, horrible, unbearable, disaster, worst ever (labeling / predictions)
4. jerk, slob, creep, hypocrite, bully, stupid (labels)

Dispute or question the accuracy of the questionable thoughts.

1. Am I upsetting myself unnecessarily? How can I see this another way?
2. Is my thinking working for or against me? How could I view this in a less upsetting way?
3. What am I demanding must happen? What do I want or prefer, rather than need?
4. Am I making something too terrible? Is it really that awful? What would be so terrible about that?
5. Am I labeling a person? What is the action that I don't like?
6. What's untrue about my thoughts? How can I stick to the facts? What's the proof for what I am thinking or believing about this?
7. Am I using extreme, black-and-white language? What less extreme words might be more accurate?
8. Am I fortune telling or mind reading in a way that gets me upset or unhappy? What are the odds (percent chance -- e.g., there is a 5% chance...) that it will really turn out the way I'm thinking or imagining?
9. What are my options in this situation? How would I like to respond?
10. Create more moderate, helpful, or realistic statements to replace the upsetting ones.
11. Have I had any experiences that show that this thought might not be completely true?
12. If my best friend or someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
13. If my best friend or someone I loved knew I was thinking this thought, what would they say to me? What evidence would they point out to me that would suggest that my thought is not completely true?
14. Are there strengths in me or positives in the situation that I am ignoring? Am I underestimating my ability to cope with unfortunate circumstances?

15. When I am not feeling this way, do I think about this situation any differently? How?
16. Have I been in this type of situation before? What happened? What have I learned from prior experiences that could help me now?
17. Five years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently? Will I focus on any different part of my experience?
18. Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?