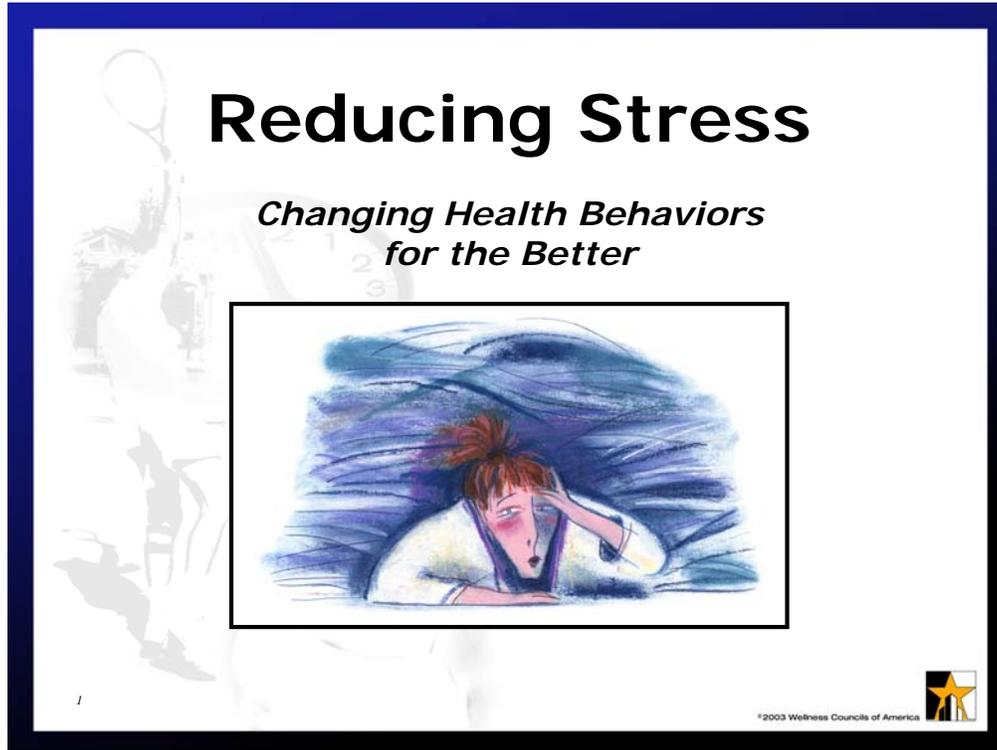


Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better



Reducing Stress: Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Welcome to *Reducing Stress: Changing Health Behaviors for the Better*. This presentation has been designed to teach individuals about the importance of managing stress in healthy living. In this presentation, the topic of stress management will be examined in detail, and stage-based strategies for dealing with stress will be explored.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

What You'll Learn

- Why managing stress is important.
- The consequences of not managing stress.
- The benefits of reducing stress.
- The barriers preventing people from reducing their stress.
- Strategies for managing stress.

2

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What You'll Learn

In this presentation you'll learn why managing stress is so important. You'll learn about the very real health consequences of excess stress, as well as the benefits of managing your stress properly. Finally, we'll look at some of the most common barriers to successfully coping with stress, as well as examine strategies that will allow you to manage your stress and live a healthier life.

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Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

What Exactly is Stress?

- Stress, by definition, is the inability to cope with a threat (real or imagined) to your well-being, which results in a series of responses and adaptations by your body.
- Stress can lead to poor health and even injury.



3

Source: *How to Handle Stress at Work* by the Wellness Councils of America.

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So What Exactly is Stress?

Stress, by definition, is the inability to cope with a threat (real or imagined) to your well-being, which results in a series of responses and adaptations by our bodies.

You may respond to a traffic jam on the office commute with anger and frustration. Someone else may view the situation as a time to relax and get away from it all.

Because stress does cause a series of responses and adaptations within our bodies, these changes—especially if they occur very frequently or are sustained over long periods of time—can lead to poor health and in some cases, injury.

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Stress vs. Challenge

- Unlike stress, “challenge” is an important ingredient for healthy and productive work.
- Often confused, challenge energizes people psychologically and physically. It motivates people to learn new skills and master their jobs.
- When a challenge is met, people feel relaxed and satisfied.

4

Source: *Stress At Work* by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

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Stress vs. Challenge

Believe it or not, there is good stress and bad stress. Good stress can take place during happy, exciting times such as a marriage, a promotion, a new job, or birth of a child. Bad stress—of which we’re most familiar—is usually represented by the death of a family member, financial troubles, extra pressure from work deadlines, etc.

Good stress is often referred to as “challenge.” Unlike stress, “challenge” is an important ingredient for a healthy and productive life.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Stress vs. Challenge

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5

Source: *Stress At Work* by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

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Stress vs. Challenge *(Continued)*

Challenge gets us moving both physically and mentally. Often, it's challenge that pushes our abilities helping us to grow, or master new jobs or skills.

When you here people say, “well, some stress is good for you,” they're most likely talking about challenge rather than true stress. The key difference is that when a challenge is met, people feel as sense of accomplishment, when they're under severe stress, negative health consequences can result.

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Stress in America Today

- With increasing time spent on the job, job stress is becoming a painful reality for many workers.
 - 40% of workers reported that their job was very often extremely stressful.
 - 25% view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.
 - 75% of employees believe that they have more on-the-job stress than the generation before them.
 - 26% of workers said they were, “often or very often burned out or stressed by their work.”

6

Source: *Stress At Work* by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

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Stress in America Today

The world of work is changing. Cell phones, pagers, faxes, e-mails, voice-mails, palm pilots, and computers now dominate our working environments—making it almost impossible to catch a breather during the course of a workday, or work week for that matter.

Today, the average American is on the job an additional 163 hours—the equivalent of adding an extra month of work to the calendar year.

Americans are working so much that the average annual working hours in the US presently exceed the average for Japan and almost all of Western Europe.

Each year since Declaration of Independence, Americans have been working harder, working longer, producing more and loving it less.

So what does all this mean?

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Stress in America Today

- More than one-third of workers say their jobs are harming their physical or emotional health.
 - 42% of workers say job pressures are interfering with family and personal relationships.
 - 50% of workers say they have a more demanding workload this year than last year.



7 Source: Attitudes in the American Workplace VII by The Marlin Company.

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Stress in America Today *(Continued)*

Research on job stress has greatly expanded in recent years. We're learning more and more about stress in the American workforce—its causes, its effects, and what can be done about it.

One thing, however, that all the research points to is the fact that the whirlwind pace of today's American workplace is causing increased stress for the American worker.

Studies show:

- 40% of workers reported that their job was very often extremely stressful.
- 25% view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.
- 75% of employees believe that workers have more on-the-job stress now than workers did a generation ago.
- 26% of workers said they were “often or very often burned out or stressed by their work.”

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Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Stress in America Today

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8 Source: Attitudes in the American Workplace VII by The Marlin Company.

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Stress in America Today *(Continued)*

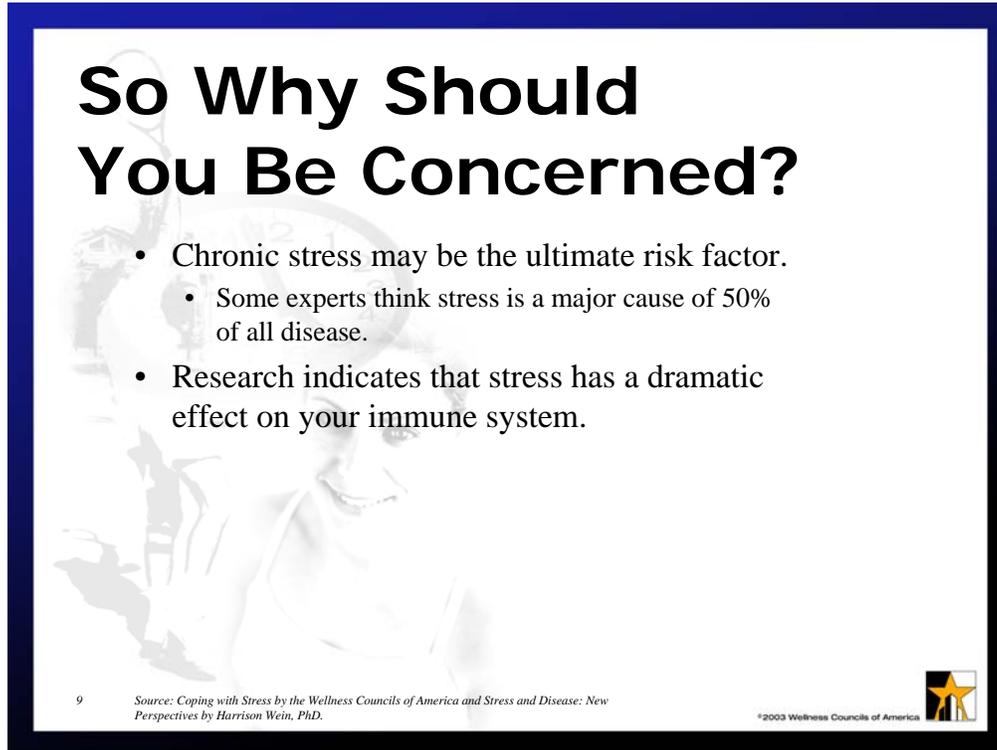
Not only are American workers experiencing a greater level of stress than ever before, they're also reporting feeling the effects of their stress more than ever before.

Other surveys show:

- More than one-third of workers say their jobs are harming their physical or emotional health.
- 42% of workers say job pressures are interfering with family and personal relationships.
- 50% of workers say they have a more demanding workload this year than last year.

Reducing Stress

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So Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Chronic stress may be the ultimate risk factor.
 - Some experts think stress is a major cause of 50% of all disease.
- Research indicates that stress has a dramatic effect on your immune system.

9 Source: Coping with Stress by the Wellness Councils of America and Stress and Disease: New Perspectives by Harrison Wein, PhD. ©2003 Wellness Councils of America

So Why Should You Be Concerned?

Some experts think that stress may cause 50% of all disease. We know that it contributes directly to the first and second leading causes of death—heart disease and cancer.

So how's this possible? Essentially, stress impairs our immune system's ability to fight off disease. Research indicates that the part of the brain that controls stress responses pumps massive amounts of hormones when you get stressed out. The cells in your immune system are, in turn, drenched in these hormones—essentially causing them to stop fighting to keep your body healthy.

So, in situations of chronic stress—stress that's day in, day out—our immune cells are less able to respond to invaders like bacteria or viruses.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

So Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Stress has been linked to the nation's two leading causes of illness—heart disease and cancer.
 - Heart disease
 - Research over the past decade has documented that mental stress is as potent a trigger of heart disease as strenuous exercise or overexertion.
 - Cancer
 - Although not conclusive, some studies have indicated an increased incidence of early death, including cancer death, among people who have experienced major life stress factors.

10

Source: *Probing the Factors behind Heart Attacks* by Beth Azar, APA and *Psychological Stress and Cancer* by the National Cancer Institute.

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So Why Should You Be Concerned? *(Continued)*

Perhaps more than ever, job stress poses a serious health risk to the American worker. As more and more research is conducted on the effects of increased stress on physical and mental health, we're seeing an even greater connection.

Stress has been linked to the nation's two leading causes of illness—heart disease and cancer.

- Research over the past decade has documented that mental stress is as potent a trigger of heart disease (heart attacks, etc.) as strenuous exercise, or overexertion.
- Although not conclusive, some studies have indicated an increased incidence of early death, including cancer death, among people who have experienced major life stress factors.

But given the fact that more than 1.2 million lives are lost each year to heart disease and cancer combined, the issue becomes even more serious.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

So Why Should You Be Concerned?

- Stress has also been linked to a number of other conditions including:
 - Lung ailments
 - Accidents
 - Cirrhosis of the liver
 - Suicide
 - Migraine headaches
 - Digestive problems
 - Mental illness
 - Sleeping problems
 - High blood pressure
 - Asthma
 - Allergies
 - Ulcers
 - Tooth decay
 - The common cold

11

Source: Coping with Stress by the Wellness Councils of America and Corporate Stress Solutions: Stress Statistics by Stress Direction.

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So Why Should You Be Concerned? (Continued)

In addition to being a contributing factor to the nation's two leading causes of death, stress impacts other health factors as well.

Stress is a factor in migraine headaches, digestive problems, mental illness, chronic insomnia, fatigue, high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, ulcers, tooth decay, and the common cold.

So, given the pervasive nature of stress, and the current climate of the American workplace, are we just to sit back and deal with this life sentence of stress? The answer is no, there is good news.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

The Good News...

- Here's the good news—life doesn't have to be as stressful for you. Just as having a high level of stress leads to negative health and life consequences, managing and reducing stress brings some important health benefits.

12

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The Good News...

Many of us have come to accept stress as normal—doesn't everyone complain about how busy they are? The expressions are familiar to us all, "I'm so stressed out!" "I just can't deal with all this right now." "I could just scream!"

But this doesn't make stress okay. We can learn to manage our stress. Just like having a high level of stress leads to negative health and life consequences, managing and reducing stress brings some important health benefits.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

The Benefits of Stress Management

- By employing strategies to help you manage stress, you'll be taking big steps in improving your health and overall quality of life.
- Managing stress will help...
 - Improve how your immune system functions.
 - Prevent illnesses like the common cold, or physical complaints such as back aches.
 - Increase your energy level, allowing you to spend more quality time with friends and family.

13

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The Benefits of Stress Management

Finding ways to manage your stress and cope with stressful situations is a huge leap forward in improving your health and overall quality of life.

Successful stress management will help your immune system function more efficiently—allowing it to focus on the barrage of germs it faces on a daily basis. When your immune system is functioning at 100%, you're less likely to have to deal with that pesky cold, or those occasional aches and pains.

Additionally, effectively managing your stress will increase your energy level. Instead of wanting to go home and crawl into bed on Friday evenings—dreading the Monday just around the corner—you'll have the energy to spend more time with your friends and family. Spending this quality time doing the things you want will help you relax and prepare you for the upcoming workweek.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

The Benefits of Stress Management

- Managing your stress also...
 - Improves the quality of your sleep; allowing you to wake up well-rested and ready to go.
 - Improves your digestion.
 - Keeps you calm when the going gets tuff.
 - Allows you to be on your game—more focused, more positive.



14

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The Benefits of Stress Management

In addition to helping you fight off heart disease and cancer and preventing pesky illnesses and aches and pains, managing your stress improves a number of other areas in your life.

You'll find that managing stress also...

- Improves the quality of your sleep; allowing you to wake up well-rested and ready to go.
- Improves your digestion.
- Keeps you calm when the going gets tuff.
- Allows you to be on your game—more focused, more positive.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Why Are People Stressed Out?

- In the midst of 50-hour workweeks and an increased workload, managing stress is no small task. Understanding the most common barriers to managing stress, however, can go a long way in turning down the pressure.

15

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Why Are People Stressed Out?

The fact of the matter is, managing stress is tough business. Understanding the most common barriers that prevent people from coping with stress, however, is an important first step in learning to manage stress. Let's take a look at some of the common barriers involved in learning to manage and cope with stress.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Barriers to Managing Stress

1. “I just ‘deal’ with my stress, it’s not a big issue.”
2. “It’s just stress, I don’t need counseling”
3. “Stress is just a part of my job.”
4. “I don’t have time to deal with my stress.”
5. “I thrive on stress.”

16

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Barriers to Managing Stress

“I just ‘deal’ with my stress, it’s not a big issue.” Although it seems there are some people who thrive on stress, they’re sure to have their breaking points, too. The fact is, stress means different things to different people. It will affect the way you deal with daily events in your life and can have a serious impact on your health.

“It’s just stress, I don’t need counseling.” Most people won’t need counseling for their stress. But having someone to talk to, be it a friend, family member, co-worker, or counselor can help you find ways of dealing with whatever life throws at you.

“Stress is just a part of my job.” It’s probably true that stress is a part of your job, however, that’s no excuse for letting stress control your life. It’s important to find effective ways of reducing, channeling, or coping with your stress. Eventually, your stress will catch up to you.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Barriers to Managing Stress

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5. “I thrive on stress.”

17

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Barriers to Managing Stress *(Continued)*

“I don’t have time to deal with my stress.” Absolutely false! The fact of the matter is you don’t have time to ignore stress. Unlike other health issues, dealing with your stress generally involves less of a time commitment, and more of a *mental* commitment to be successful. Again, stress is powerful, and in time, it’ll take its toll on you.

“I thrive on stress.” It’s more likely that this statement is made by someone who thrives on challenge. Remember the difference, challenge drives a person to learn or master new skills. Stress is the inability to cope with threats to your well-being.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Barriers to Managing Stress

6. “People who are stressed just can’t cope with reality.”
7. “If I just make it through these next few weeks I’ll be OK.”
8. “I’m so stressed, I don’t even know where to start.”
9. “Dealing with my stress would just be too expensive.”
10. “I’m always stressed, it hasn’t made a difference so far.”

18

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Barriers to Managing Stress *(Continued)*

“People who are stressed just can’t cope with reality.” Although stress itself isn’t a disease, it’s something that should be taken very seriously. Being stressed doesn’t make you a weak person—stress is something that most, if not all people experience in their lives. How you deal with your stress is what’s important.

“If I just make it through these next few weeks, I’ll be OK.” Stress tends to work pretty quickly. You may not make it through those next few weeks if stress is bearing down on you. Increased stress makes you tired, less able to stay in the saddle. Finding ways to cope with and channel your stress will get you through, “those next few weeks.”

“I’m so stressed, I don’t even know where to start.” There’s little doubt that stress is an extremely powerful force, but there are a lot of little things you can do to get on the track to coping with stress. Your library or the Internet are great resources for finding plenty of tips and strategies to help you effectively manage your stress.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Barriers to Managing Stress

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19

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Barriers to Managing Stress *(Continued)*

Dealing with my stress will just be too expensive.” While one-on-one counseling sessions can be an effective way to help you deal with stress, they can add up financially. But the fact is, you probably won’t need counseling to effectively cope with your stress. Find some strategies you can do on your own that help you relax and cope.

“I’m always stressed, it hasn’t made a difference so far.” While some stress effects are harder to detect, chances are you’re experiencing the effects of stress and just don’t know it. How’s your sleeping? How’s your overall attitude with others? Talk with others to see what changes they’ve noticed as your stress level has increased.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Making Stress Management a Priority

- In order to make stress management a priority, it's important to understand the process of how people change. When changing behaviors, like those associated with reducing stress, most people go through a cycle known as the "*Stages of Change*."

20

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Making Stress Management a Priority

Overcoming common barriers is a key first step in making healthy changes in your life. But without a roadmap—and without a clear, concise way of conceptualizing your challenges—it's going to be tough to make any progress. That's why understanding the "Stages of Change" is so important in the process of changing health behaviors for the better. Let's take a look at how people change.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

The Five Stages of Change

Stage 1: Nope...Not interested in dealing with my stress right now.

Stage 2: Hmm...I'm seriously considering stress management.

Stage 3: Yep...I'm getting ready to start dealing with stress.

Stage 4: Let's go...I'm managing my stress.

Stage 5: Old news...I've been able to cope with my stress for a long time.

21

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The Five Stages of Change

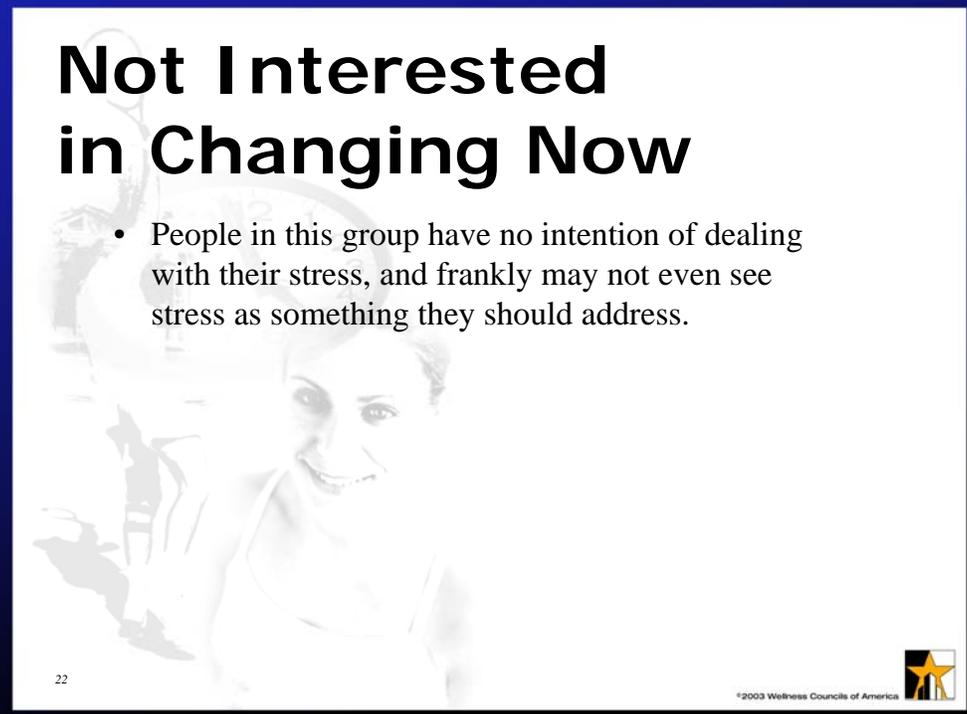
Understanding how people change means having a firm grasp on a theory known as the Stages of Change. The Stages of Change is a model developed by Dr. James Prochaska that proposes that people cycle through a very distinct set of stages when making changes in their lives. From not being interested in making a change at all, all the way through to maintaining a healthy change after it's already been made, the Stages of Change model can help you change your health behaviors for the better. Let's take a look at the five stages of change so that we can understand them better and apply them in our plans to get healthier.

Here are the five stages of change:

1. Not at all ready to change
2. Seriously considering a healthy change
3. Getting ready to change
4. In the process of changing
5. Maintaining a healthy behavior

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**Not Interested
in Changing Now**

- People in this group have no intention of dealing with their stress, and frankly may not even see stress as something they should address.

22

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Not Interested In Changing Now

People here have no real intention of managing their stress. And, although their friends and family may see the need for them to better cope with their everyday pressures, the person may not even see stress as being a potential problem in their life.

Oftentimes, what gets people thinking about making a change, like finding ways to cope with their stress, is steady, outside pressure. This pressure is a good thing—it gets people moving. People in this stage will often resist change, they may be lacking information, and quite often see their situation—mistakenly—as hopeless.

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23 Serious Consideration

- These people understand that finding ways to manage their stress would be good for them, but they aren't making concrete plans to manage their stress.

23

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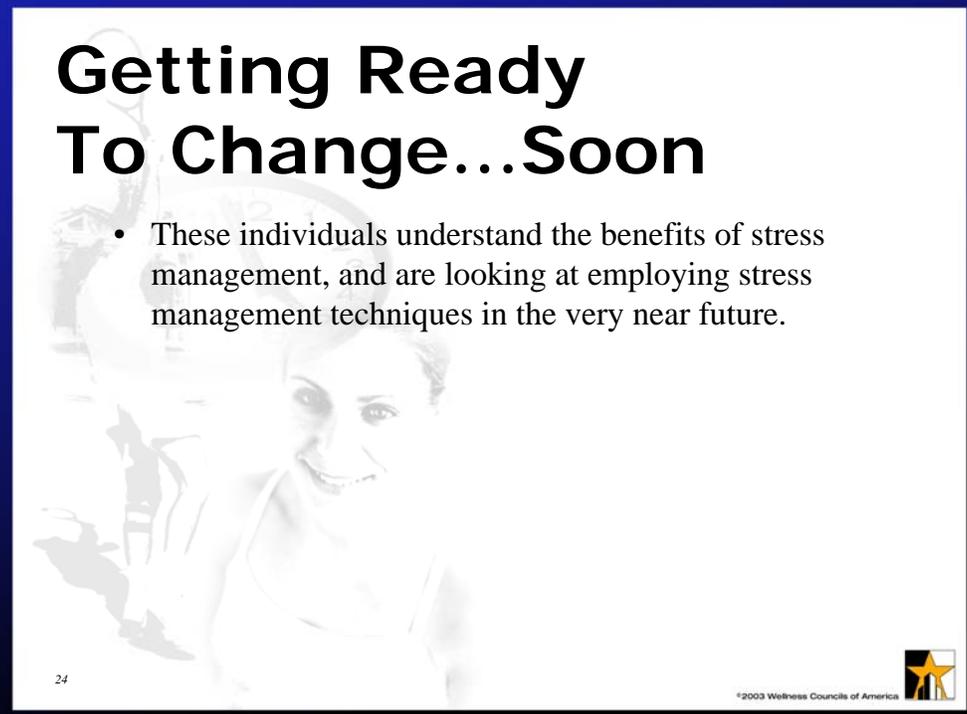
Serious Consideration

People here acknowledge the fact that they need to make a change, or that something is a problem for them. They begin to understand that finding ways to cope with their stress would be good for them. And even though they are beginning to think seriously about making a change, people here are often very far—maybe even years—away from making concrete plans to change.

It is only after people begin to focus more on the solution than their problem, and think more about the future than the past that they are ready to start taking action.

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Getting Ready To Change...Soon

- These individuals understand the benefits of stress management, and are looking at employing stress management techniques in the very near future.

24

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Getting Ready to Change...Soon

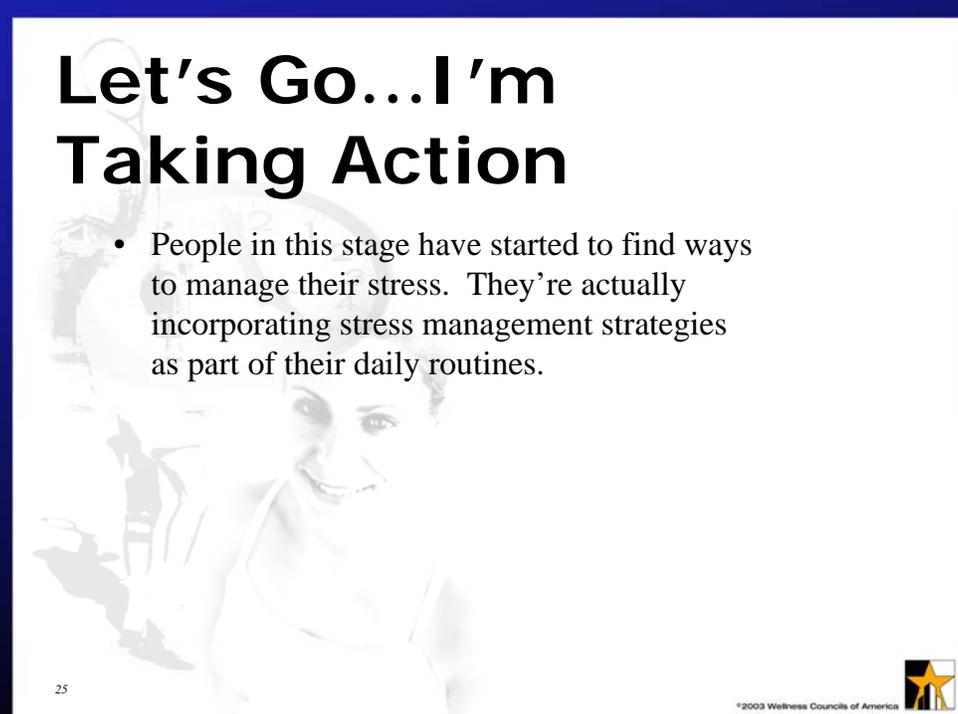
It's here where people are formulating concrete plans for stress management—and within the next thirty days. They are preparing to change both their behaviors and the environment, which affects their behaviors.

Here, people may have already instituted a number of smaller changes, such as talking with a friend or relative about their stress. And although changes are beginning to happen, a person still may need to convince himself or herself that their changes will be for the better.

Preparing to change is important, and shouldn't be rushed. People, who rush through their preparation, often fall backwards—even denying that they need to make the changes after all. To be successful here, people need to plan carefully and develop a firm and detailed plan—concentrating on sustaining their changes once made.

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Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

- People in this stage have started to find ways to manage their stress. They're actually incorporating stress management strategies as part of their daily routines.

25

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Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

In this stage of the change process, a person is making their most overt changes. They're incorporating stress management techniques on a regular basis.

It's in this stage that changing behaviors takes the most energy and commitment. Because of this, it's often easy for people to mistake action for change. It's important to remember that change involves altering a person's level of awareness, their emotions, self-image, and thinking—so, there's more to changing behaviors than what's on the surface. In this stage, there's still a little ways to go before managing stress becomes natural.

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Old News...Been There, Done That

- These people are successfully managing the stress in their lives. The new strategies they're using to deal with and address stress have become a normal behavior for them.



26

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Old News...Been There, Done That

Here, people are working to hang on to the positive changes that they've made. For the most part, coping with stress has become a part of the person. In this stage, the majority of the person's efforts focus on maintaining their changes—preventing lapses or relapses where stress begins to take hold again.

From here, with strong commitment and dedication, stress management becomes very natural. Stress management becomes more of a core value—or something they think little about or try hard to maintain.

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What Stage Are You In?

- Determining what stage you're in is an important first step in learning to manage stress. Once you know where you're at, you'll be better equipped to cope with whatever life throws at you.

27

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What Stage Are You In?

Now that we've had a chance to learn a little more about each of the stages of change, it's time to decide which stage you fall into. Take a look at the following self-quiz—it will help you determine your place in the stages of change.

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Determining Your Stage: Self Quiz

To find out what stage you're in, pick the statement that most accurately describes you:

- I'm currently stressed, and I don't intend to find ways of coping within the next six months.
- I'm currently stressed, but I'm thinking about dealing with it in the next six months.
- I'm currently stressed, but have, on and off, tried to gain some control over it.
- I've managed to reduce my stress within the last six months.
- I've been successfully managing my stress for more than six months now.

28

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Determining Your Stage: Self Quiz

The following statements are designed to help you gauge your readiness to change. It's important to be honest with yourself, picking the statement that most accurately describes you. As you begin to consider your current health status, think of this self-quiz as a chance to start the change process on the right foot.

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Determining Your Stage

Each of the following statements corresponds to a stage in the change process.

If you checked:

- I'm currently stressed, and I don't intend to find ways of coping within the next six months—**you're in stage one.**
- I'm currently stressed, but I'm thinking about dealing with it in the next six months—**you're in stage two.**
- I'm currently stressed, but have, on and off, tried to gain some control over it—**you're in stage three.**
- I've managed to reduce my stress within the last six months—**you're in stage four.**
- I've been successfully managing my stress for more than six months now—**you're in stage five.**

29

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Determining Your Stage

If the first statement most accurately describes you, you're in stage one—not really thinking about making a change right now. If you picked the second statement, you're in stage two, thinking about changing within the next six months. If statement three most accurately describes you, you've begun preparing to make a significant change in your life. Those who picked statement four are in the process of changing and those who picked statement five are currently maintaining a change already made.

No matter what stage you're in, we'll now discuss strategies to help you be successful in changing your health behaviors for the good. Let's look at some change strategies for the first stage.

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Strategies for Change: Stage 1

Not Interested in Changing Now

- Read, *Coping With Stress*.
- Create a list of reasons why managing your stress will benefit you.
- Create a list of why managing your stress will benefit your family.

30

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Strategies for Change: Stage 1

Read, *Coping With Stress*. This informative brochure is a great place to get started when you're thinking about changing a negative health behavior. Learning about a specific health risk can inspire you to change your ways.

Create a list of reasons why managing your stress will benefit you. Listing out the reasons for engaging in a negative health behavior will give you a better idea of why you do it in the first place. This information can be a valuable baseline as you begin thinking about what it will take to live a healthier lifestyle.

Create a list of why managing your stress will benefit your family. Listing out the reasons to change a negative health behavior forces us to consider the severe health and social consequences we'll face if we refuse to change.

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Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 1

Not Interested in Changing Now

- Watch the movie, *Falling Down*.
- Make a list of the people pressuring you to better manage your stress.
- Write about two situations in the last year where you defended your inability to deal with stress.

31

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Strategies for Change: Stage 1 (Continued)

Watch the movie, *Falling Down*. This movie is a great examination of stress in America. With the increasing demand being placed on workers today, this movie will no doubt speak to you about the negative effects of excessive stress.

Make a list of the people pressuring you to better manage your stress. Identifying individuals pressuring you to change will enlighten you to the fact that they're doing it because they care about you.

Write about two situations in the last year when you defended your inability to deal with stress. Doing this will be a real eye opener. Often we don't realize the rationalizations we make until we really sit down and think about them. It's no surprise, in order to continue with negative health behaviors, we have to make some pretty juicy rationalizations.

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Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 2

I'm Giving Change Serious Consideration

- Read, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Ken Blanchard.
- Describe how your stress makes you feel emotionally.
- Write down your five biggest stressors.

32

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Strategies for Change: Stage 2

Read, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Ken Blanchard. This informative book is a great place to get started when you're thinking about changing a negative health behavior. Learning about a specific health risk can inspire you to change your ways.

Describe how your stress makes you feel emotionally. Very much the opposite of trying to relax, describing in detail your emotions related to a negative health behavior can incite feelings that instigate more rapid change.

Write down your five biggest stressors. Once you know the barriers that prevent you from leading a healthier life, you'll be better positioned to change your circumstances and overcome the hurdles in your path.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 2

I'm Giving Change Serious Consideration

- Speak with a friend who's experiencing negative health effects as a result of high stress.
- At least one time per day, make sure to spend 15 minutes doing something you find relaxing (reading, talking with friends, etc.).
- Take a stress self-assessment.

33

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Strategies for Change: Stage 2 (Continued)

Speak with a friend who's experiencing negative health as a result of high stress.

Although this may be an uncomfortable task, speaking with someone who has experienced the negative health consequences of high stress can be a great way to learn from others' mistakes. You'll find, too, that usually these individuals are willing to speak to you and encourage you to make wise decisions before it's too late.

At least one time per day, make sure to spend 15 minutes doing something you find relaxing (reading, talking with friends, etc.). As you begin to contemplate making a serious behavior change, taking a bit of time to explore the change each day will help you get a handle on what it will take to change this behavior for the better.

Reducing Stress

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Strategies for Change: Stage 2

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34

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Strategies for Change: Stage 2 (Continued)

Take a stress self-assessment. Self-assessments are easy and unbiased ways to fairly examine your habits when it comes to healthy living. As an added bonus, the questions included on these assessments can help you better understand your behavior and develop a plan for getting healthy.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 3

Getting Ready to Change Soon

- If available, meet with an EAP counselor at your place of work.
- Create a written plan to incorporate a moderate amount of physical activity into your routine to help you deal with stress.
- Tell your friends and family about your plans to reduce your stress level.

35

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Strategies for Change: Stage 3

If available, meet with an EAP counselor at your place of work. Employee assistance counselors are skilled in helping individuals learn to effectively manage challenging areas in their lives.

Create a written plan to incorporate stress management strategies into your routine to help you deal with stress. Everyone would agree, many times our negative health behaviors are a matter of habit—we know when to expect them. By making a plan on how you'll manage a certain urge or habit, you'll be better prepared to face the challenge head on.

Tell your friends and family about your plans to reduce your stress level. Telling your family and friends about your plans to change your health behavior will bring a sense of accountability into your life. After all, who wants to disappoint friends or family?

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 3

Getting Ready to Change Soon

- Find a friend who will help you manage your stress. Make sure to develop a plan on how this relationship will function.
- Mark a date on the calendar when you will begin a new, less stressed way of life.
- Purchase relaxation CD's and videos to use at home and in the car.

36

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Strategies for Change: Stage 3 (Continued)

Find a friend who will help you manage your stress. Make sure to develop a plan on how this relationship will function. There's no reason to go it alone. Identifying people to help you in your efforts to change for the better will go a long way in helping you develop the support structure you need to succeed.

Mark a date on the calendar when you will begin a new, less stressed way of life. Identifying a date makes action a tangible step in the change process. But remember, when the date rolls around, make sure to make good on your promise.

Purchase relaxation CD's and videos to use at home and in the car. These resources have been developed specifically to help you manage your stress and relax. Take advantage of them.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 4

Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

- Enroll in a stress management class to help you achieve your goals.
- Regularly update your friends and family on your efforts to reduce stress.
- Begin a regular walking program to help you reduce stress.

37

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Strategies for Change: Stage 4

Enroll in a stress management class or support group to help you achieve your goals. It's important to develop a social support group when trying to incorporate healthier habits into your life. Having a support group gives you a chance to vent your frustrations, and can be encouraging because you know you're not alone.

Regularly update your friends and family on your efforts to reduce stress.

Continual updates will not only encourage your friends and family, but will also give you a reason to continue in your efforts to change your behavior.

Begin a regular walking program to help you reduce stress. Physical activity can be a great ally in your battle to manage stress more effectively. Not only is physical activity good for your overall health and well-being, but it can also improve your outlook on life.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 4

Let's Go...I'm Taking Action

- Create a list of responses that you can use as substitutes to getting stressed out
- Take on a new activity like golfing, joining a walking club, or bicycling.
- Learn and utilize a stress management technique like yoga or meditation.

38

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Strategies for Change: Stage 4 (Continued)

Create a list of responses that you can use as substitutes to getting stressed out.

Again, sometimes our health behaviors are simply a matter of habit. If we can identify different, more positive health habits to substitute for negative ones, we'll be more prepared to change for the better.

Take on a new activity like golfing, joining a walking club, or bicycling.

These new activities, more times than not, will help you manage your stress. They'll also be good activities to take on when you need to get your mind off of your stressors.

Learn and utilize a stress management technique like yoga or meditation. These techniques can be good for the mind, body, and soul. As an added bonus, learning a new skill will also expand your mind and introduce you to new topics and ideas.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 5

Old News... Been There, Done That

- Celebrate accomplishing your written stress management plan.
- Continue to develop healthy habits in your life beyond exercise and stress management.
- Offer yourself as a testimonial to others about the benefits of stress management.

39

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Strategies for Change: Stage 5

Celebrate accomplishing your written stress management plan. There's nothing like rewarding yourself for a job well done. A celebration after reaching your goals is important in staying on the right track as you work to form your new, healthier behaviors into habits.

Continue to develop healthy habits in your life beyond exercise and stress management. Doing this further entrenches a lifestyle characterized by making the right decisions. There's a whole world out there you never knew before—take advantage of it!

Offer yourself as a testimonial to others about the benefits of regular exercise. If you become a spokesperson for health, chances are you won't be very eager to spoil your reputation by falling back into your old, negative health behaviors.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Strategies for Change: Stage 5

Old News...Been There, Done That

- Create a list of all the benefits you've been experiencing since beginning to manage your stress—be sure to review previous lists and write down how things have changed.
- Identify what has been the most helpful resource on your road to managing stress and incorporate more of it into your life (i.e., books, relaxation CD's, etc.).

40

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Strategies for Change: Stage 5 (Continued)

Create a list of all the benefits you've been experiencing since beginning to manage your stress—be sure to review previous lists and write down how things have changed. This list will serve as reinforcement that you made the right decision when difficult situations tempt you to fall back into your old way of doing things.

Identify what has been the most helpful resource on your road to managing stress and incorporate more of it into your life (i.e., books, relaxation CD's, etc.). Getting new clothes and possessions into your life is a wonderful way to shed the old persona and emerge as a new and healthier individual. This action can really help solidify that you've changed for good.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

Key Point: Change is a Process

- Pay attention to all of these change strategies no matter which stage you're in. Because learning to manage stress is a process, chances are you'll find yourself in each stage at some point in the process.



41

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Key Point: Managing Stress is a Process

As you work through the change process, remember, you're likely to visit each stage more than once before you're successful in adopting a new and healthier lifestyle. Knowing this, it's important to pay attention to the strategies presented for each stage of the process—not only will you be better prepared to meet the challenges presented along the road to change, but having a general understanding of the change process can also help you in each of the stages while you're changing your health behaviors for the better.

Reducing Stress

Changing Health Behaviors for the Better

General Tips for Managing Stress

- Regular exercise is a great way to reduce the effects of stress.
- Lead a healthy lifestyle—proper nutrition makes a big difference.
- Take one thing at a time.
- Go easy with criticism.
- Be realistic in what you *can* accomplish compared to what you *want* to accomplish.
- Shed the “superman/superwoman” urge—realize that no one’s perfect, you will make mistakes.

42

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General Tips for Managing Stress

Stress has become a part of our daily lives. It’s different things to different people, but it affects both the way we deal with events in our lives, as well as impacts our health.

What’s important, however, is that we deal with our stress or find ways of coping with it. The following tips and strategies will be helpful to you if you’re interested in learning to manage your stress.

- Regular exercise is a great way to reduce the effects of stress.
- Lead a healthy lifestyle—proper nutrition makes a big difference.
- Take one thing at a time.
- Go easy with criticism.
- Be realistic in what you *can* accomplish compared to what you *want* to accomplish.
- Shed the “superman/superwoman” urge—realize that no one’s perfect, you will make mistakes.