

**STRESS**

As we enter a new semester, the change in our routines may sometimes seem overwhelming. This feeling may be due to improperly managed stress. In order to manage stress appropriately, we must first understand what stress is.

**Top 10 Stressful Life Events**

1. Spouse’s Death
2. Divorce
3. Marriage separation
4. Jail term
5. Death of a close relative
6. Injury or illness
7. Marriage
8. Fired from job
9. Marriage reconciliation
10. Retirement

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. Stress is not necessarily a bad thing and is needed for us to thrive in everyday life. Stress prompts us to solve problems or overcome obstacles we are faced within our daily lives.

Small doses of stress can be described as **Good Stress**.

Good stress, such as birth of a child or publication of a research article, causes a sudden burst in the body’s hormones. These hormones, such as cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine cause an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and a rise in blood glucose. These stressors are exciting and manageable events.

Excessive or unmanaged stress can cause what is known as **Distress**. Since the body cannot distinguish between physical or psychological threats, when you are stressed over a busy schedule or a traffic jam, your body reacts the same way it would when in a life or death situation by releasing the hormones mentioned previously.

**Managing**

**Stress**

The continued release of these hormones over a long term can lead to multiple health issues, including heart disease.

**What does stress do to your health?**

Excessive hormones produced due to stress can lead to multiple health issues, affecting the entire person.

**Mental Health**: Excessive stress can lead to such issues as depression and anxiety. If these problems are not addressed then burn out with ones job can occur.

**Emotional Health**: Stress can cause us to become easily frustrated, angry, or sad. Excessive stress can cause us to over react to minor events of stress.

**Physical Health**: The affects of stress on our physical health is more easily tested for when compared to other health issues. The overload of hormones can lead to many health related issues including heart disease, pain of any kind, digestive problems, sleep problems, obesity, autoimmune diseases, and multiple skin conditions, such as eczema and acne.

**Ways to Manage Stress**

The only way to avoid these health issues when they are attributed to stress is to properly manage your stress. There are many ways to properly manage your stress including:

* Avoid stressful situations
* Avoid extremes
* Change how you react to stress
* Set priorities
* Set realistic goals
* Take control of the situation
* Manage how stress affects you
* Change how you see the situation
* Sleep
* Discover new relaxation techniques
* Exercise
* Meditation
* Listening to relaxing music
* Time management

In order to properly manage your stress you must first be able to recognize when stress is becoming a problem.

**Recognizing When Stress has Become a Problem**

Knowing your limits when it comes to stress is important since how much stress you can tolerate can differ from others. What may cause extreme stress for one person may cause extreme excitement for another. Different levels of tolerance towards stress can be influenced by multiple factors. Factors influencing stress tolerance include:

* Your support network
* Your sense of control
* Your attitude and outlook
* Your ability to deal with your emotions
* Your knowledge and preparation

Understanding your tolerance for stress and the events that cause stress in your life can help you to deal with stress. It is also important to understand when stress levels have become out of control. Stress warning signs and symptoms can include the following:

* Memory problems
* Poor judgment
* Constant worry
* Aches and pains
* Loss of sex drive
* Frequent colds
* Moodiness
* Irritability
* Agitation
* Eating more or less
* Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax.

**Stress and Cancer**

Recent research by The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston shows that stress hormones such as adrenaline can directly support tumor growth and spread. The study explored the effects of stress on a process of programmed cell death known as anoikis (a process by which cells die when they are not attached to other cells); a process researchers say cancer cells have found a way to bypass. Cultured cancer cells exposed to stress hormones protected themselves from self destruction. Results were seen to follow the same path when studied in animal specimens. More information on this study can be found at

* http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=does-stress-feed-cancer
* *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*

**Important Issues with Stress**

It is also important to remember that when we are stressed our behaviors and actions can rub-off on those around use. Children’s and teens are susceptible to taking on the emotions and behaviors presented by their parents. This fact makes dealing with stress appropriately important.

Children and teens are already experiencing a number of their own stressful life events and need to be lead by example when dealing with stress. It is important not to unload our problems on our children and to be willing to listen and give advice to their problems. We must also be observant and recognize the signs and symptoms of excessive stress on children and teens, so that we are able to help them appropriately.

For more information about stress and for other tips on dealing with stress appropriately refer to the following aids:

* http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\_signs.htm
* http://www.drbenkim.com/reduce-stress.html
* http://www.stress.org/
* http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=does-stress-feed-cancer
* http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/stress.html

**Other News:**

**Upcoming Events:**

* **Hope Week** –

September 26- October 2

* **Race for the Cure** – October 16, Little Rock

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Helen Grimes, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.