

## All You Ever Wanted To Know About Stress... But Were Too Tense to Ask!

Thousands of articles have been written on the dangers of living a stressful life. We will never be able to totally get rid of all stress because we are alive and breathing and living in a stressful world. What we CAN do is to learn to manage our stress and try to keep it from managing us! Drawing boundaries and resigning from “fixer of all things in the universe” are important steps in this endeavor.

If you are a workforce professional, you probably feel a unique kind of stress at times. You have chosen an admirable career, one in which you serve people, help them to get back on their feet and improve their lives. You have challenges which are specific unto your profession: dealing with crises and heavy workloads; wearing multiple hats; and keeping up with ever-changing requirements and new techniques and technologies... not to mention the special needs of the people you serve. It is important to realize that taking care of yourself is a critical part of your job. You can't give away what you don't have, and if you burn out you won't be able to help anyone.

Sadly, in our society, we have learned to equate stress with success. We wear it like a badge of honor. We dress for success and we stress for success. We look at a person who lives in a pressure cooker and we're impressed by how adept she is at running in ten different directions at once, juggling appointments, issuing orders, and working 20 hours a day. On the other hand, if a person is low key, relaxed, calm, and isn't afraid to take time for herself, we tend to assume she doesn't have many responsibilities and probably doesn't hold a very critical job. Obviously, that is not the case!



How do you know if you are stressed? You might be stressed if you wake up screaming from a terrible nightmare, only to realize that you have not yet been asleep. You might be stressed if you cannot move your fingers due to your fist being knotted so tightly, you'd need a crowbar to open it. You might be stressed if your body is so stiff; you look like a cardboard cutout. You might be stressed if people use the word “caffeinated” to describe you. You might be stressed if even your hair is tense. For instance, ask yourself these questions:

1. Am I always sure that I have the correct solutions to challenges and know the best way to accomplish something? Is it important to me to be the first to have the answers to all of the questions?

Consider this: Always needing to be right or the first to know the answer can cause your body to click into “fight mode” when your brain senses a disagreement coming on. Feeling that you always have to be in a competition can induce stress... it also can damage relationships. Part of being a successful leader is training and allowing others on your team to sometimes take the lead.

2. Is my personal theme song “Nobody Does it Better?”

Consider this: Good leadership means delegating and working as a team. Feeling as if the earth will spin out of orbit if you let someone else take a shot at something will not only cause you stress, but also leave you exhausted, angry, and resentful. Most of the time, our egos prevent us from stepping aside and sharing responsibilities. Even though we complain about the work load, we are afraid to give it up because we have defined our worth by our accomplishments. We insist on doing it all, and then when we are worn out, we feel used and abused.

3. Am I worried that I will appear selfish or be replaced if I take time for myself?

Consider this: You are a valuable commodity and hold much worth for your organization and your family. In order to continue to do what needs to be done, you have to take care of yourself. A wise person realizes and appreciates that self-care is an integral part of remaining successful. You take care of your car and make sure it is in good running condition. Why would you not do the same for your body? If you are not healthy in mind, body, and spirit, you will not be any good to anyone! Enjoy your achievements but don't allow them to become burdens of greatness!

When you feel as if you are coming apart and you have run out of glue, you might find some of these stress-busting tips to be entertaining and useful:

- Get some toys. Keep a toy basket or at least designate part of a drawer to your stress-breaking props. Make a point

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to search for funny cartoons, articles, and pictures... anything to put your mind in a happy place.

- Dig up your sense of humor. The very word humor means “fluid” and it keeps you flowing over the speed bumps of life! Build a “laugh library” of funny movies, books, cartoons, pictures, and stories.

- Take time each day to meditate, pray, and calm your mind. Even if you can only squeeze in five minutes of relaxation time, every little bit helps and it becomes a habit.

- Hang up your “super-hero” cape. Learn to say that precious little word “NO,” and realize that contrary to some of your friends and family members’ beliefs, you are NOT responsible for every aspect of their lives.

- Do not expect disaster.

- Accept that you are an important person, but not indispensable. Life will go on and the earth will continue to rotate on its axis if you relinquish some of your control.

- Carry funny stuff in your car. I have a cow mask that I wear at stoplights.

- Identify hot stress buttons and try not to touch them. There is no glory in being a stress martyr!

- Don’t obsess over what is wrong but focus on what is right.

- Decide that you really want to relax, and commit to making it a priority. Believe me, it CAN be done. Nobody else can do it for you... they can only cry over you when your head explodes! Don’t wait until you are nearly dead to decide what’s important.

Remember that stress is not an event;

it’s the way you react to something that’s happening. Everything is not a crisis, so choose your battles. Most of the things over which we stress seem extremely important at the time, but are totally forgotten in a few days. The most important thing to remember is that while some stress can be motivating, most of it just erodes your body and drains your energy. Save your stress for something that really warrants it... like when the restaurant is out of your favorite dessert item

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