

Chronic stress

“but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm”. Proverbs 1:33

We hear so much about stress today. Everybody’s stressed! The fact is that short bursts of stress are our body’s way of getting us through difficult or dangerous situations. It sends out chemicals that increase energy, alertness, and productivity. Problems result when stress lasts for long periods of time. That’s when our health suffers from the effects of chronic stress. When we are constantly sending our bodies into overdrive, the heart has to work harder than usual, increasing our risks for a wide variety of medical conditions. These include high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.

Some common causes of stress include relationship problems, caring for an ill or disabled family member, job problems, or living with a family member who is under stress.

Stress is a natural part of life—for instance, changing jobs, having a baby, or moving to a new home. These are all very stressful activities. We can’t control most of the stressors that come our way, but we can control our response to them. Think about how you are coping with the stress in your life. Do you get enough sleep to recover from the activities of the last day? Are you smoking, drinking, or eating more as a response to stress? Are you praying regularly to hand your problems over to God?

Each individual has his own capacity for dealing with stress. Events that will totally stress out one person may not cause any stress in the next person. Our capacity to deal with stress is strongly influenced by heredity and childhood experiences, whether a strong support system of family and/or friends is available, and even one’s level of income and social status. Stress is our perception of an event or circumstance, and the feeling that we have no control over the situation.

Strategies for dealing with stress are wide-ranging. First, identify exactly what is causing your stress. Then you can figure out how to reduce these stressors in a healthy manner. Learn to manage your time—prioritize your schedule and learn to say **NO**. Allow more time for relaxation and be good to yourself. Try new ways of thinking: when you begin to worry; practice letting it go. **Worrying is a strictly negative activity—nothing positive ever results from worry.**

Ask for help, we can’t do it all alone. Stress relievers include moderate exercise—daily walking is ideal. Try writing out your feelings, and express them verbally: talk, laugh, and cry. Do something you like, such as a hobby, or even volunteer. A healthy diet and eight hours of sleep each night are very important.

Learn how to relax your body. Practice being in the “moment” with meditation or self-hypnosis. Picture your safe, quiet place, and take yourself there whenever you need to feel calm. There are breathing exercises, such as taking a deep breath and holding it as long as you can, then letting it out slowly. Another method is alternately tensing and releasing each muscle in the body. There are probably millions of books with ideas and techniques to help you learn to control your stress, instead of the other way around. Visit your library and find the right one for you. There are always people with bigger problems than your own. Helping them is a great way to take the focus off your own concerns. There are opportunities at every shelter (animal and human), hospital, food bank, church, and nursing home, to name a few.

And finally, as corny as it sounds, laughter really is the best medicine as well as a great stress reliever. Find some fun in life—a comedian, a funny book, or a crazy friend, and take control of your stress.

For more information, check out:

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-management/SR00031>