

# How to Turn Distress into De-Stress

*Stress sneaks up on us — which means we spend less effort on prevention than we do on coping with anxiety. But we must deal with stress in our lives because it's more than a headache and a bad mood — stress can kill you. Stress is one of the key factors in heart attack and stroke, and leads to obesity, high blood pressure, a compromised immune system, and a whole host of emotional problems.*

We don't overtly choose stress, which means we can't just close our eyes and make it go away. Stress is a response to real life, but the filter between what's really going on and the meaning you assign to it can, in fact, be part of the problem. In other words, putting your challenges into the right perspective and remaining positive is a key element of coping with stress. There are ways to get there, but when they don't work there are professionals who can help.

## The Three Forms of Stress

■ There are three primary ways we experience stress, each with separate responses and healthy, proactive approaches to de-stressing for what might otherwise compromise our health. They are physical stress, emotional stress, and “work” stress, the latter involving time management and conflict resolution. These areas overlap, sometimes until the lines blur. But when you work toward de-stressing one area, the others benefit.

## Coping with Physical Stress

■ We hold stress within our bodies, creating very real consequences. Much like an overinflated balloon on the verge of bursting, we need to relieve the pressure of stress with physical activities, the more strenuous the better. Find a sport, even a hobby, that takes your mind off your problems and allows you to exert yourself in other ways, and your body will thank you for it. If that doesn't work, find a way to completely relax and unwind on a regular basis.

## Coping with Emotional Stress

■ Stress is always emotional, which is why you should find ways to put your problems into perspective. The best way to de-stress your emotions is to face the problem and to make a plan that provides hope of a positive outcome. When you allow stress to manage you, it wins. So take charge of your challenges and the stress will dissipate. Don't hesitate to get counseling from a professional. If you don't get a handle on your emotions, physical consequences are right around the corner.

## Coping with Work Stress

■ Work and personal relationships are the most common sources of stress, both physical and emotional. It usually involves our inability to accept a situation and the loss of hope for improvement. The most stressful response is to do nothing, to just endure. Take charge of your life and address the issue — talk to your employer about what concerns you. If you

can't see light at the end of the tunnel, consider changing positions or even companies. Change can involve pain, but when it gives you hope for better things, stress quickly melts away.

Some approaches work to de-stress all three areas: meditation techniques, less sugar and caffeine in your diet, relaxing music, and breathing techniques, especially when you feel anxious. And most of all, find a way to bring laughter back into your life. It's the best de-stressing technique there is.

