

## Coping With Stress

### What is Stress?

'General Adaptation Syndrome,' as identified by Hans Hugo Bruno Selye (1907-1982), is the precursor to what we now understand as stress. Stress seems to be widely understood as something unpleasant and/or demanding. It can manifest through psychological, emotional, and physical symptoms. Almost everyone experiences stress at some point in life.

### Chronic vs. Acute Stress

Chronic stressors can include: continuous work pressures, ongoing relationship problems, persistent financial worries, and long-term medical conditions (diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's, etc.).

Acute stressors appear suddenly and may include: noise, hunger, danger, illness or infection, and emotional worries such as imagining a threat or remembering a dangerous event. Acute stressors are typified by the tendency to create a fight-or-flight response.

### Risk Factors

Conditions likely to produce stress:

An accumulation of persistent stressful situations (such as a high pressure job)

Acute stress paired with a severe illness

Unrelenting stress after a severe acute response to a traumatic event

Personal factors in response to stress

Early childhood development can impact body's ability to appropriately regulate stress

Temperament and genetic factors can cause 'over responding' to stressful events

The length and intensity of the stressors

### How to Counteract Stress

*As you approach dealing with your stress in healthy ways, remember there is no single technique that works for everyone.*

#### Lifestyle Changes

Diet and exercise have been shown to positively or negatively impact one's ability to cope with stress. This could mean starting an exercise program. Even going on a brisk walk has been shown to be effective in reducing stress.

#### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Working with a licensed clinician has proven effective in mitigating stress and its impact.

#### Restructuring Priorities

Do enjoyable things for the sake of doing them. Taking a vacation, listening to soothing music, or owning a pet can help. Be proactive in your efforts to confront stress early.

#### Relaxation Techniques

Learning yoga, meditation, hypnosis, and even acupuncture can yield promising results.

### Individuals at a High Risk

Women

Working mothers

Older adults

Less educated individuals

Divorced or widowed individuals

People who are isolated

People who live in cities

### The Body's Response to Stress

The brain responds to acute stress by releasing the stress hormone cortisol and steroid hormones (glucocorticoids). The function of these hormones is to get us through the stressful event.

The heart and lungs are activated to allow the body to deal with the event by increasing the heart rate and blood pressure, and breathing more rapidly to take in more oxygen.

The mouth, throat, skin, and even metabolism are all affected by the stressful event, as nonessential functions in the body are temporarily suspended in order to make the most of available energy and bodily resources.

The relaxation response occurs when the stress hormones return to normal and the rest of the body's systems return to baseline.

### What Blomquist Hale Can Do

We can help you evaluate the effects of stress on your life and offer suggestions about how to recover. Call us today to set up an appointment.

*According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, 39% of adults report overeating or eating unhealthy foods due to stress.*

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