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PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH PROGRAM
NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU

Stress Management

WVNG Coffey Break

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This month’s topic is Stress Management. At some time or another, all of us experience stress. Stress is what we feel when we have to handle more than we are used to. The demands may come from one direction such as work or from multiple directions, such as family, work, and even friendships. Not all stress is bad stress nor detrimental to our health. However, whether it is bad stress or *eustress* (good stress), the impact on our lives is similar if it happens too often or lasts too long. In this month’s article we are going to discuss how stress impacts us physically and mentally as well as address ways to manage our stress. So please, take a few minutes to read the following article before hitting “Delete” on your computer.

“The mark of a successful man is one that has spent an entire day on the bank of a river without feeling guilty for it.”

- Author unknown

The mission of the National Guard Psychological Health Program is to advocate, promote and guide National Guard members and their families by supporting psychological fitness for operational readiness. For contact information regarding the Director of Psychological Health in your state or territory or other resources, go to: www.jointservicessupport.org/

Stress Reduction Kit

Bang Head Here

Quick Tips to lower your stress level

1. Dare to say No
2. Quit blaming yourself
3. Be pro-active in finding peace
4. When you need help, get help
5. Stop gritting your teeth
6. Switch to Decaf
7. Schedule Worry Time
8. Boost Your Vitamin Intake
9. Stretch
10. Goof Off

Break (brāk) definition *verb*: To interrupt or stop *break a habit*; *noun*: A respite or brief pause *taking a break*.

"Stress is the trash of modern life – we all generate it but if you don't dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life." - Danzae Pace

What happens when you are stressed?

When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It produces hormones that speed up your heart, makes you breathe faster, and gives you a burst of energy. This is called the fight or flight stress response.

Some stress is normal and even useful. Stress can help you if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you finish an important job on time or win a race. But if it happens too often or too long, it can have bad effects. It can be linked to headaches, upset stomach, back pain, and trouble sleeping. It can weaken your immune system, making it harder to fight off disease. If you already have a health problem, stress can make it worse. It can make you moody, depressed, or tense. Your relationships may suffer, and you may experience problems at work or at school.

How Stressed am I?

Answer the next 10 questions as honestly as you can. Don't worry. No one's looking or judging you.

- Have your eating and sleeping habits changed?
- Do you feel exhausted throughout the day?
- Do you feel as though you are always working and getting nothing done?
- Do you suffer from head, neck, back, and even stomach aches?
- Do you sometimes have dizzy spells where your palms sweat and heart races?
- Do you have emotional outbursts where you cry or become angered easily?
- Do you get sick a lot? More than usual?
- Do you have cardiovascular problems that put you at risk for a stroke or heart attack?
- Do you find that your mind is still consumed with worry even when you're supposed to be relaxing or spending quiet time with the family?
- When is the last time you took a vacation?

If you answered yes to the majority of these questions, then the time has come to do something about it.

What Can I do about Stress?

The good news is that you can learn to manage your stress. To get stress under control, follow these 3 steps:

1. Identify what is causing the stress.
2. Look for ways to reduce the stress.
3. Learn healthy ways to relieve stress or reduce its harmful side effects.

Now, I know, working through these simple steps is not always so simple. Making changes in our lives is hard work. Sometimes it means making tough decisions. However, the benefits of managing stress are worth the effort. Likewise, there may be significant consequences if you don't.

Step 1– Identify the Stress

Sometimes it's clear where the stress is coming from. You can count on stress during a major life change such as the death of a loved one, getting married, or having a baby. You may be in the middle of a relationship conflict. Other times, it may not be so easy to determine why you feel stressed.

Keeping a stress diary for a few weeks may be help you identify the stressors and patterns in your response to the stress.

- At the end of every day, note stressful situations and their cause
- After each entry, indicate the intensity of stress you felt on a 0-10 scale (0 being no stress)
- Write down how the episode made you feel emotionally and physically
- Note your response to the stressor
- How effective was your response?
- Record anything that made you feel better

In a week or two, review your entries. Look at the intensity of stress and identify what the most stressful events are for you.

If your symptoms are emotional, then mental relaxation and stress management techniques may be helpful.

How are you responding to your stress? Do you have typical ways you respond, and if so, what are they? Look at your stress symptoms. List your symptoms as either physical or emotional. If your symptoms are physical, then physical stress management techniques may be beneficial

Step 2 – Look for Ways to Reduce the Stress

Even if you can't get rid of the stress, you can still look for ways to reduce it. You may try some of these ideas:

- **Learn better ways to manage your time.** You may get more done with less stress if you make a schedule. Do the most important things first.
- **Find better ways to cope.** Look at how you've been dealing with the stress. Be honest about what works and what doesn't. Try other methods that might work better.
- **Work on letting go of things you cannot change.** When you find yourself starting to worry, learn to say "no."
- **Speak up.** Not being able to talk about your needs and concerns can create stress and can make negative feelings worse. Assertive communication can help you express how you feel in a tactful way.

Ask for help. People who have a strong network of family and friends manage stress better. Participating in counseling with an objective professional is also an option.

Step 3 – Learn healthy ways to relieve stress or reduce its negative side effects

- **Take care of yourself.** This includes exercising, eating right, getting plenty of rest, not smoking, and limiting alcohol consumption.
- **Do something you enjoy.** A hobby can help you relax.
- **Learn ways to relax your body.** This can include muscle relaxation exercises, breathing exercises, yoga, massages, and aromatherapy.
- **Focus on the present.** Try meditation or imagery exercises. Listen to relaxing music. Try to look for the humor in life. Laughter really can be the best medicine.

Next Month: Understanding Traumatic Brain Injury

Feedback on this article is welcomed. As always, if you have a concern about yourself or a family member, feel free to contact me. Services are free and confidential. I look forward to hearing from you. So……Step back , take a Coffey Break, and Drink to Your Health!

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"If your teeth are clinched and your feet are clinched, your lifespan is probably clinched." – Adabella Radici

References

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