

# Stress: The Silent Killer

## Stress

Although physical stressors are usually caused by external factors and psychological stressors are caused by how we perceive things, your body reacts in much the same way to both of them. Whether you are in a car accident or you have an argument, your heart beat speeds up, your blood pressure increases, your muscles tighten and many other physical changes occur (most involuntary and unknown to you). Depending upon your situation these physical reactions to stress may take place several times a week or even every day. As you become stressed more frequently, these physical reactions can create problems such as headaches, nausea, fatigue, sleeplessness, and more. Over a period of time the constant stress that causes these reoccurring reactions can weaken your immune system, opening up a chance for disease to strike. Some studies have shown that stress could play a silent role in diseases which affect and kill many Americans.

So what can I do to manage my stress? First, realize that stress is a necessary part of your life and without some stress you would not be healthy either. However, too much of anything, even good things, can have negative effects. That's why you need to manage your stress level so that you stay healthy and functional.

Here are six external things you can do to help better manage your stress.

## Play

Once a week do something you enjoy so much that you can lose track of time. This activity can have absolutely no purpose other than to make you relive your childhood play-time.



## Sleep

If you are faced with a high stressed life your body needs enough rest to handle it. Without enough rest you will further weaken your immune system. Get what you need!

## Eat

Being stressed takes a lot of energy. If you give your body the kind of food it needs to work at its best (carbohydrates - such as pasta, bread, fruits), you will have better energy to meet your stressful situations.

## Exercise

This is the simplest and most direct way to relieve stress. Since a stress reaction

(muscle tension, heart rate increase, etc.) is preparing your body to do something physical, exercise such as walking, biking or swimming is the perfect remedy!

## Relax

It often seems we forget how to relax. Relaxation comes in many forms and is different for everyone. Deep breathing, body massages, mental imagery, hobbies, music and other relaxing activities are good ways to stop the stress for a short time and revitalize you.

## Avoid Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs

Many times, our first reaction to a stressful situation may be to reach for a drink to help "relieve" the stress. What we are actually doing is making our bodies deal with the stress AND the alcohol, which the body treats as a poison and tries to get rid of. So instead of relieving our stress with these not-so-healthy choices we end up OVER-LOADING our bodies and making the situation worse.

It's a little trickier to manage the psychological stress because it is created by your thoughts and perceptions. However, if you become aware of your own thoughts and realize you create them, and therefore can control them, you are on your way to better managing the origin of most of your stress - your mind.