

Stressed Out?

April 2005

Did you know? April 16th is Stress Awareness Day! In fact, the entire month of April has been designated to help people focus on stress and find ways to cope. Stress is a normal part of life and, in small doses, it can be a good thing. However, if stressful situations pile up one after another your body has no chance to recover. According to the health experts at the Mayo Clinic this “long-term activation of the stress-response system can disrupt almost all of your body’s processes increasing your risk of obesity, insomnia, digestive complaints, heart disease and depression.” What can you do to protect yourself? It’s simple—take care of your body!

Eat Healthy

Don’t skip meals—A good rule of thumb is to space meals about three to four hours apart. Eat a balanced diet that includes complex carbohydrates (for energy and stable blood sugar), lean protein foods (for mental alertness) and moderate fat (for satiety).

Make snacks nutritious—Nuts, fruit, yogurt, string cheese sticks and popcorn make better choices than typical snack foods like chips, colas and candy.

Don’t overdo caffeine and refined sugar—These foods “only add fuel to the stress fire,” according to Elizabeth Somer M.A., R.D. author of *Food & Mood*.

Avoid alcohol—Don’t rely on alcohol to reduce stress. Alcohol provides the body with zero nutrition while acting as a depressant and diuretic. It keeps the body in a stressed state and will cause more problems than it solves.

Exercise Regularly

Exercise is recognized as one of our best stress relievers. Exercise spends stress hormones, strengthens organs targeted by stress, improves sleep and increases energy.

Get Your Zzzzz’s

Your body needs time to recover from stressful events— seven hours a night should do it. Remember, alcohol may make you sleepy at first, but you’ll sleep less soundly and wake up more tired as a result.

Learn to Relax

There are numerous strategies for relaxation—find one that works for you! Consider breathing exercises, massage, aromatherapy, yoga, meditation, art or music therapy, guided imagery or humor therapy which reduces stress and boosts the body’s immune system.

“The time to relax is when you don’t have time for it.”

—Author Unknown