

STRESS MANAGEMENT – The Impact of Stress

Stress is an inevitable part of life. The experience of stress in small doses can actually be beneficial. For instance, stress can help us meet daily challenges and can motivate us to reach our goals.

However, too much stress can be detrimental and can weaken the immune system, cause high blood pressure, fatigue, depression, anxiety, irritability, headaches, as well as, other health related issues. The problem with stress is that it can be a viscous cycle. As the negative symptoms of stress increase so does our levels of stress and as our experience of stress increases so does our experience of negative symptoms.

The good news is that there are ways you can improve the way you respond to stress. Before we look at how to manage our stress so that we can decrease the negative symptoms of stress, let's look at how stress impacts all aspects of our lives.

I like to utilize the concept **BREATHE** to demonstrate the areas of our life that can be impacted by our health (both mental and physical health).

B - Body
R - Relationships
E - Emotions
A - Activity
TH - Thoughts
E - Economy

Have you thought of health in this way before? Most of us only think of our physical health when we think of being “in good health.” The reality is that our economic health, relationships health, activity level, our thoughts, and emotions all impact each other and contribute to our physical health and visa versa. For instance, if we are struggling financially that can impact our thoughts we have about ourselves, our situation, as well as, those around us. We may begin to worry about not being able to pay the bills, about how we are going to feed our family (Economy). That can contribute to us feeling sad and anxious that we are not a good enough to provide for our family (Emotions/Thoughts), which in turn might cause arguments between us and our partner or family (Relationships). We may also feel unmotivated to go for our daily walk (Activity) or visit with friends (Relationships/Activity).

It might not end there – we may begin having thoughts that we will get fired because we are so anxious or stressed that we feel like you are not doing a good job (thoughts) or your so tired because we haven't been able to sleep or we get sick because were stressed and have to miss work. (Body/Economics). Whew! I'm anxious just thinking about this scenario.

To begin stress management, let's look at our overall health using the BREATHE. If I were to ask you to rate yourself on each area (BREATHE), how would you rate yourself from 1-10?

B____ R____ E____ A____ TH____ E____

Now I would like you to rate how you would like to be in each area.

B____ R____ E____ A____ TH____ E____

KEY

1-3= Very unhealthy. I have difficulty managing this area. Things are not well.

4-6 = Unhealthy. Things are not well but I manage adequately.

7 = Decently Healthy. I manage difficult situations/issues okay. Things are ok.

8 = Moderately Healthy. I manage difficult situations/issues well.

9-10 = Very Healthy. This area is going very well for me. I manage it well.