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# ◊ A New You ◊

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Volume III, Issue 1

March 2008

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## Reduce Stress in 10 Easy Steps

Stress is a natural part of everyday life. Left unchecked, however, stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders which can affect your health, vitality, and peace-of-mind, as well as personal and professional relationships.

Everyone handles stress differently, some better than others, and this is often dependent on the number of stressors in your life at any one time.

## Negative Reactions to Stress

- Do minor problems and disappointments upset you excessively?
- Do the small pleasures of life fail to satisfy you?
- Are you unable to stop thinking of your worries?
- Do you feel inadequate or suffer from self-doubt?
- Are you constantly tired?
- Do you experience anger over minor problems?
- Have you noticed a change in your sleeping or eating patterns?
- Do you suffer from chronic pain, headaches, or back aches?

These are all negative reactions to stress that can negatively affect your health, happiness and functioning.

Stress is a part of life; the only totally stress-free people are dead. So the goal is to minimize stress rather than eliminate it.

## What is Stress

Most experts define stress as a response to life events or situations such as the following:

- Having too many responsibilities
- Vague or confusing expectations



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***Caring for your needs is what we do best.***

## What is Stress cont.

- Facing too many distractions
- Having to do tasks for which one is unprepared
- Working with difficult people
- Being bored
- Moving
- Major holidays
- Personal injury or illness
- Illness/injury of a loved one
- Death of a loved one
- Marital conflicts
- Divorce or separation
- Experiencing too many changes
- Child leaving home
- Extended family conflicts
- Being in physical danger
- Legal problems
- Fired or laid off from work
- Financial difficulties
- Retirement
- Living or working in a crowded space
- Not getting enough exercise
- Poor nutrition
- Not getting enough sleep
- Not enough time to relax
- Dissatisfaction with your physical appearance
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Abuse of drugs or alcohol by a loved one

These situations, in addition to positive events or changes can all cause stress. The more stressors that you have at any one time, the more likely you are to have symptoms or problems from stress.

## Social and Cultural Causes of Stress

Stress has become a factor in our culture in the last decades due to the continual push toward conveniences such as ATM machines, fax machines, cell phones, E-mail, texting, and instant messaging. All of these “conveniences” have made life easier in many ways, but they also have woven an expectation of instant gratification and 24/7 schedules into our culture. This fast pace often causes stress.

## Stress at Work

Most people complain of stress at work at one time or another. It often results from one of the following:

- Having too much or too little to do
- Very complicated or demanding work
- Boring and repetitive work
- Unclear goals and expectations
- Feeling unappreciated/devalued/ineffective
- Changing or confusing procedures
- Being at a career dead-end
- Dysfunctional work environment
- Conflicts with coworkers or supervisors
- Management issues

## Work Stress Affects All Workers

People at the top of organizations suffer from stress because of excessive workloads, unrealistic expectations, and isolation. The phrase “it’s lonely at the top” has some truth to it.

Middle managers often experience stress because they have responsibility for the people who report to them, but may lack the control to execute projects. They may also have increasing workloads and be in fear of possible termination due to corporate downsizing.

Professionals suffer from their own brand of stress caused by monotony. Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals often perform the same kind of work for many years, often resulting in boredom and desperation.

Workers at lower levels often feel stress caused by boredom and frustration of dealing with the public. They also may feel less successful than their coworkers in higher level jobs and may feel stressed by their level of status and pay.

## Workplace Stress Has Increased

Over time, the nature of work has changed. The fight-or-flight response that used to be effective in protecting us from immediate danger of being attacked by a wild animal is now ineffective in response to the stresses of today’s life.

The workplace has become decentralized. Often people no longer work together in one place, but may be scattered around the world or work from home, or be expected to work long hours, interfering with family time.

Generational differences contribute to stress at work. Working with peers who may have different attitudes about work, or different work ethics can be a challenge.

The threat of layoffs or downsizing can cause a significant amount of stress when workers worry about the security of their financial future.

## How Stress Affects Parents

Parents face increasing demands including the logistics of child care. In previous generations it was common to have one parent at home to be the primary caregiver of children. In addition, there was typically a supportive extended family system nearby to help with child care. These days, the majority of families have either both parents employed or are single parent families with the parent working outside the home. Families also tend to be spread out across great distances making immediate childcare help from extended family unavailable.

Parents are required to balance the duties of caring for children, home, work, relationship and self. This can be an extremely stressful balancing act at times.

## How Stress Affects Kids & Teens

These days, with the pressure to make the grade, win the trophy, be popular, get to music lessons and lacrosse practice, finish your homework, text your friends, and keep up with the latest trends, kids are experiencing more and more stress. The frequency of sleep problems in children and teens is a prime example of the increase in stress. Gone are the days when kids had downtime to use their imagination and simply be a kid. Now their days are often as overly programmed as the rest of us with schedules and technology taking over in the form of multifunction cell phones, video games, television, etc.

## How Stress Affects Singles

There is often a perceived pressure on single adults, and even adolescents that they should be in a relationship. The subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, message can be that if you aren't in a relationship, then something is wrong with you. The truth of the matter is that being in a relationship does have many benefits. However, being in a relationship, just to be in a relationship often brings more troubles since it often means that people get into relationships not based on who is a healthy match for them, but simply on who is available at the moment. This often leads to very unhealthy relationships.

Waiting to find a good match, someone who shares many of your values, goals and beliefs, is a much healthier alternative. Also, working on getting yourself emotionally healthy will help you attract a more healthy mate.

## De-Stress Yourself in 10 Easy Steps

1. **SMILE**
2. **Replace negative thoughts with positives**
3. **Practice saying No without guilt**
4. **Eat a well balanced, healthy diet**
5. **Limit sweets, caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and drugs**
6. **Allow time for adequate rest and sleep**
7. **Exercise moderately 5-7 times per week**
8. **Accept that you are not perfect, and learn from your mistakes**
9. **Ask for help, delegate and prioritize**
10. **Practice relaxation, meditation, visualization and deep breathing**

Regular practice of the techniques listed above can help to reduce the negative impact of stress. The more you practice healthy stress relievers, the more they begin to become healthy habits that you do without having to think about them, replacing unhealthy coping mechanisms such as overeating, avoiding exercise, smoking, drinking, gambling, etc. Learning to cope with stress in healthy ways is an invaluable lesson.

## Managing the Stress in Your Life

The first step to managing the stress in your life is to determine what you have control over and what you don't. You have control over what you think. By practicing what is called "thought stopping" you can learn how to take control of your thoughts in order to change how you feel. This can greatly reduce the effects of stress on your life.

## Therapy Can Help Reduce Stress

Psychotherapy can help to reduce stress by helping you to identify the particular issues that are contributing stress to your life. In therapy you can also learn tools and techniques to:

- Improve assertiveness, helping you to set boundaries and limits to decrease stress.
- Learn relaxation techniques such as visualization, deep breathing, and progressive relaxation.
- Learn thought stopping techniques.
- Improve communication with significant others to increase support and decrease conflict.
- Improve parenting techniques to create a more peaceful environment at home.
- Improve self confidence.
- Develop a stronger support network.
- Develop healthier habits such as exercise, healthy eating, more restful sleep and a more balanced life.
- Decrease unhealthy habits such as caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, drugs.
- Learn to stop enabling other's unhealthy behaviors.
- Decrease guilt.
- Improve mood.
- Utilize the power of your subconscious mind to help achieve your goals.
- Work through past hurts and let go of the pain.

Help from a qualified professional can often make a difference in helping you to learn how to take control of your life, develop more of a healthy balance and reduce stress. Hypnosis can also be very helpful in improving relaxation and improving healthy coping techniques.

## NHPA Services

Individual Therapy  
Family Therapy  
Couples Counseling  
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Hypnotherapy  
Pain Management  
Relaxation Training  
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Learning Disability Testing  
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Speaking Engagements  
Practice Coaching

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*Thank you so much for  
your kind referrals.*

## Announcing our Expansion

NHPA is pleased to announce the expansion of our Allison Park office which should be completed by the end of April 2008. This expansion will give us a large group/conference room which will allow us to begin to offer groups and workshops. If you have an interest in a particular group or workshop that you would like to see offered, please let us know. We will be happy to consider your request. Look for announcements about new programs soon.

## Job Opening:

NHPA has an immediate opening for a part-time receptionist to work Monday through Thursday evenings and some Saturdays in our Allison Park office. Duties include answering phones, taking new client calls, and general secretarial work. If interested, send resume to lgephart@nhpa.com, or fax to 412-492-9906, or mail to 4068 Mt. Royal Blvd., Suite 125, Allison Park, PA 15101.

If you would like to discuss how we can help you to cope with stress in more healthy ways, call today at 412-492-0644 ext. 40 so that we can match you with the most appropriate clinician for your needs.

Please feel free to share this newsletter with others who may be interested. If you would like more copies, please call the office at 412-492-0644 ext. 40.