

Is Workplace Stress Consuming Your Life?

Tips for the Effective Management of Stress

Clearwater, FL; July 11, 2008 — Work and stress seem to go hand-in-hand. Contributing to workplace stress are extended work weeks, technological advances, and recent economic downturns. The physical, emotional, and psychological effects stress induces can negatively affect professional performance and personal relationships. Effective management of stress can renew professional focus, improve personal relationships, and alleviate many common health ailments.

According to The American Institute on Stress, the average American works an average of 49 hours a week. In addition to time clocked at the office, many Americans bring work home with them, thanks to technological innovations such as e-mail, cell phones, and the Internet. Escaping from office stressors proves to be a difficult task in a world where everyone is constantly connected. Adding to concerns are the changing economic times with increases in mergers, corporate closures, layoffs, and downsizing.

In a 2007 American Psychological Association survey, 75 percent of Americans list work as a significant source of stress. Exposure to stressors occurs on a daily basis. Therefore, effective stress management should be a daily routine, rather than something occasionally penciled into one's schedule. **Tom Riggs, LCSW, President and CEO of Directions for Mental Health in Clearwater**, explains that alleviating stress should be done daily to avoid accumulating excess stress that impacts all aspects of a person's life, including their health. He outlines six essential components for stress management.

- ∞ Exercise
Aerobic exercise removes stress-related fatigue poisons from the body. Grueling, high-impact exercise is not necessary to obtain these benefits. Walking for at least thirty minutes, several times a week achieves beneficial results.

- ∞ Diet
Fatigue, issues sleeping, and digestive problems are several side effects of stress. Reducing or eliminating excess animal fats and simple carbohydrates (i.e.: sugar) can diminish the incidence and severity of these side effects. Healthy diets rich in whole grains and fresh vegetables help lessen the effects of stress.

- ∞ Personal Relationships

The importance of personal relationships cannot be overstated when it comes to stress management. Friends and loved ones aid in stress reduction by listening to concerns and feelings. Laughing and spending time with these people distracts the mind, eases anxieties, and relieves stress.

∞ Active Thought Process

The way people think effects their stress levels. Understanding the difference between active problem solving and passive worrying is essential in stress management. Problem solving addresses issues and develops plans of action for various outcomes. Worrying focus on potential negative outcomes, but never addresses means to deal with those outcomes. In order to reduce stress, one must stop the negative thought cycle.

∞ Recreation

Participating in activities that are enjoyable is a great stress reliever. Sports, painting, reading, gardening, and other hobbies are beneficial. These diversions occupy the mind in a positive way which prevents dwelling and worrying.

∞ Relaxation

Many define recreation and relaxation the same way. However, the relaxation response is more than relief from physical or mental work. Meditation and other relaxation techniques clear the mind and improve focus and productivity. Practicing relaxation at least three times a week for a minimum of twenty minutes alleviates stress.

According to Riggs, it is important to integrate these elements into daily routines to achieve the benefits and effectively manage stress. During times of intense stress it may be easy to push these things aside in favor of getting more work done, but it is during these intense moments that the most benefits are obtained from these stress relievers. Taking the time out to carry out these actions, says Riggs, will not only reduce stress levels, it will also increase productivity and efficiency, positively affect personal relationships, and reduce common health issues.

About Directions for Mental Health, Inc.

Directions for Mental Health, Inc., established in 1982, is a non-profit organization committed to helping heal the hurt in the lives of thousands of Pinellas County residents suffering from – or at risk of – mental illness. With nationally accredited programs, Directions sets the standard for best practices in mental health treatment, while making mental health care affordable and accessible to individuals and families, and building a safer, healthier community.

Serving more than 8,000 people per year, Directions is dedicated to developing innovative programs that change lives, while reducing crime, homelessness, drug abuse, and child abuse.

For questions about mental illness and programs, visit Directions for Mental Health's website at www.healthehurt.com or call (727) 524-4464 extension 1700.

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