

## Ways to Deal with Stress

We all feel stressed at various times and for various reasons and everyone has their own way of handling and reducing the feelings and impact of stress in their lives. However, the symptoms of stress; headaches, sleeplessness, upset stomachs or neurotic responses, when experienced in various degrees and combinations, can be a problem. Treating the symptoms of stress rather than their causes is a bit like putting a piece of masking tape over the red "engine overheating" light on your car's instrument panel—"out of sight, out of mind." Unfortunately, the problem may get worse and cause more serious damage further on down the road.

Below are a number of techniques for dealing with the **causes** and symptoms of stress. We suggest you place a check mark in the box preceding each one that you feel you should be doing. If you feel concerned about any of these symptoms you should talk to someone you trust, either a family member, someone at your sports organisation or your doctor.

- Exercise.** Anxiety and relaxation cannot coexist; they are mutually exclusive. Deep peace and relaxation follow a good physical workout. But the activity must be something you enjoy. (Don't jog if you don't like jogging—the physical benefits will be offset by the mental anguish of "I've got to do it since it's good for me.")
- Vent Your Feelings.** Let off emotional steam. Tell people how you feel. One reason men die younger than women is that men have been conditioned to suppress emotions—the "strong, silent" type. If you can't vent to the source of your stress (boss, ungrateful sibling), then talk with others or keep a journal where you can get things off your chest.
- Do the Opposite.** If commuter traffic induces stress, get up earlier. If certain friends irritate you, drop them. If long lines in the supermarket bother you, shop at off-hours. Change your habits so as to minimise stressful situations.
- Help Others.** Most stress is the result of focusing unduly on ourselves and our own problems. The best way to break this cycle is to look outward for example, volunteer work, sports clubs, church groups, adult education (as a student or teacher), etc.
- Restructuring.** Events don't cause stress; your interpretations of them do! Change the way you view things. If employees aren't meeting your expectations, most of the time they aren't stupid or lazy. They just need more guidance, clearer goals, and/or meaningful feedback and rewards from you.
- Assertiveness.** Stress is often the result of our passive responses. We don't know how to say no to the boss, parents, spouse or friends, or how to reject unfair criticism. We then regret giving in, and stress mounts. Learn to say no, practice giving and getting negative feedback, tell others how you feel. By so doing, you'll avoid greater stress later.
- Lower the Rhythm.** Many forms of mental and physical relaxation are available: meditation, yoga, biofeedback, massage, self-hypnosis, prayer. Allow quiet moments in your life:
  - (a) Close your eyes on the train (not in the car!) and spend some time with yourself.
  - (b) At work take a quiet walk at lunchtime somewhere where there are plenty of trees.
  - (c) Close the office door and stretch out on the floor for five to ten minutes, breathing slowly. If you don't have an office make sure the office is empty before you do this or the person in the office may be slightly concerned.