

To stress or not to stress?

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It is common to encounter stress on a daily basis. From sitting in traffic to presenting at a conference, we must learn to recognize stress and how it affects our daily life. Some days are more stressful than others; however, long term stress leads to burnout, illness and possible disease.

Stress has been affecting Americans for decades. According to the June 6, 1983 cover of Time Magazine, stress was labeled as the “Epidemic of the Eighties”. The American Institute of Stress labels stress as “America’s Number One Health Problem.” Chronic physical or mental stress leads to an emotional imbalance and affects various areas of the body. Physically, stress leads to hair loss, digestive issues, headaches, high blood pressure and muscle cramps. Mentally, stress leaves us depressed, confused, unmotivated, forgetful and compulsive.

One way of defeating stress is to learn acceptance. This maybe acceptance of a situation or time period. In simple terms, we need to learn and accept what we can and can not control. For example, heavy traffic is something beyond our control. Yelling, honking the horn and screaming at the car in front of us is enhancing much negative stress on the mind and the body. When we factor in all the daily stress episodes, we start to realize that we are overwhelmed with stress. We need to learn to let go of worrying about the situations that we cannot control.

On the other hand, people need to recognize what they can control in order to better their stress. An example of this is if a person is stressed out about their poor finances, and maybe they have a Starbucks coffee habit. Drinking coffee at a café daily adds up fast and results in hundreds if not near a thousand dollars spent annually. This person may alleviate some financial stress through brewing the coffee at home.

So what to do next? For one week, log in a journal, or recognize each time you encounter a stressful situation. At the end of the week, analyze or chart which situations you can and cannot control. Recognizing these patterns leads to long term happiness, not anxiety or stress. So take a deep breath, and hope for a less stressful future.

Beyond Your Control

Traffic Budget cuts or layoffs Unpredictable events (Flight Cancellations) “Acts of God” –
Traumatic Weather Technology Glitches Words that someone said about you Health –
Genetics

What You Can Control

Speaking instead of Arguing with Spouse Preparing for interviews, presentations or
seminars Personal responsibility Controlling your thoughts, actions and behaviors (taking the
mature approach) Health – Diet + Exercise

*BIO: **Elizabeth Kovar** M.A., Seattle resident, is the fitness coordinator at the Lynnwood Recreation Center. Elizabeth is a freelance fitness and travel writer, in addition to a personal trainer and group fitness instructor. She has also studied and worked within the fitness and sport industry within India and Australia. Please send questions and comments to erkovar@nwfitnessmag.com*