

Understanding Stress

Stress is the natural reaction of your body to life's demands. Stressors are the conditions surrounding you or events in your life that may trigger stress. Your body may respond differently to stressors, depending upon whether the stressor is new (acute stress) or it has been in your life for a long time (chronic stress.) Not all stress is bad stress.

Acute stress is the reaction of your body to a significant event. The stress response is immediate and intense. A single episode of acute stress doesn't usually create problems for healthy people. Mild acute stress can actually be the positive impetus to motivate you into action to accomplish your goals and desires in life. Those suffering from other stress-related disorders could have difficulties compounded by intense acute stress. A good stress management system can help to prepare you for these episodes.

Persistent stress can lead to health problems over time. The effects of chronic stress appear slowly and subtly; but may be longer lasting and could be problematic.

An effective stress management program involves identifying and managing both acute and chronic stress.

Keeping a Stress Journal

A stress journal is a tool that is easy to use that can help you to identify your stressors. It also provides you with insight into how specific stressors are affecting your life and provides you with the opportunity to discover ways to manage stress based on specific stressors in your life.

Begin your stress journal by making note of the stressors you experience over the next week. By each stressor, assign a value for how high your stress reaction rates. (1 = not too stressful; 10 = very stressful) Also jot down a brief description of your reaction to the stressor. Note how you felt at the time. Then at that time or some time later, write down your thoughts about how you might choose to react differently to this stressor in the future (stress management ideas.)

Example Stress Journal Fields:

- Date/Time:
- Stressor:
- Rating:
- Reaction:
- How I felt:
- Management Ideas: