
Wise Notes for Consumers

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Responding to Stress

According to the American Psychiatric Association “one-third of Americans are living with extreme stress. Stress is taking a toll on people – contributing to health problems, poor relationships, and lost productivity at work.” Some short-term stress can be positive – causing us to deal constructively with daily problems or meet challenges or deadlines. But, when stress remains long-term – chronically or continuously – it can be damaging both emotionally and physically.

What can be done about stress in our lives? First, identify what is causing the stress. Consider whether your stressors are:

- major or minor (e.g., lost keys or lost job),
- temporary or permanent (e.g., giving a speech or a poor marriage relationship),
- relational (e.g., uncomfortable living situation or stressful work relationship), or
- internal (e.g., unrealistic expectations, or low self-esteem or self criticism).

Once you identify the cause(s), it may be easier to choose strategies to help alleviate the stress. Below are four approaches that may help.

When you need to deal with stress on the spot, try these strategies: count to 10 before you speak; take 3-5 slow, deep breaths; go for a walk; say “I’m sorry” if you make a mistake; and begin the day by breaking bigger problems down into smaller ones.

Eat a healthy diet which includes lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, as well as choosing lean meats and eating less refined sugar, processed foods, and saturated fats.

Have a healthy attitude. Most people who are resilient to stress do two important things: they focus on immediate issues – what needs to be done right now, and they have an optimistic explanatory style – assuming their troubles are temporary (“*I’m tired today*”) rather than permanent (“*I’m washed up*”); specific (“*I have a bad habit*”) rather than universal (“*I’m a bad person*”). Find enjoyment in life. Doing things you enjoy is a natural way to fight stress. Try to find one thing to do each day that you enjoy – even if it’s just for 15 minutes.

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The healthier you are, the better able you are to manage stress. Try to get 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week. Exercise not only helps you get in shape, but it also helps you relieve pent up tension, sleep better, and burn up some of the chemicals that are released with the bodily response to stress. So another good reason to dust off those walking shoes, form your team of eight and join us for Walk Across Texas beginning March 6- April 30! Online registration is available by logging on to <http://walkacrosstexas.tamu.edu>. Also, feel free to contact the Wise County Extension Office at 940.627.3341.

And, one last tip; try laughing more. Research suggests that laughter really is the best medicine. The experience of laughter can increase our physical, mental and emotional well-being. The benefits of laughter can be documented when we consider how laughter serves to safeguard our health, to increase our ability to problem solve and to help us with difficult events or situations.

For more information, contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Wise County at 940/627-3341.

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