

I am a wife and mother of two wonderful children. I have a full-time job that can be stressful at times. When I get home in the evenings there is more to do. My husband and I fix dinner for the family, clean up the kitchen, spend time with the children, get them ready for bed, pick up the house, and then we collapse into bed. I am so overwhelmed and sometimes want to cry that my life has turned into this daily routine.

Most of us would agree that in our lives today we are challenged by demands, deadlines, hassles and frustrations. And with our busy schedules, stress is pretty common and for some of us a way of life.

Stress isn't always bad, in fact in small doses stress can be a good thing making you more alert, helping you perform under pressure and motivating you to do the best you can. But when you are constantly running in emergency mode, stress can take a toll on your mental and physical health.

Stress is caused by both external and internal factors. Some of the more common causes of external stress are major life changes, your job or loss of job, relationship difficulties, financial problems, children and family and just being too busy. Internal causes of stress are our inability to accept uncertainty, pessimism, negative self-talk, unrealistic expectations, and perfectionism.

We all respond to stress differently. It is important to recognize when your stress levels are out of control. The dangerous thing about stress is how easily we start to get used to it and that for some, stress begins to feel pretty normal and we don't notice how much it's affecting our bodies.

Some signs of stress are pretty easy to recognize such as not eating or eating too much, forgetfulness, headaches, lack of energy, lack of focus, trouble getting things done, short temper, trouble sleeping, upset stomach and general aches and pains. These symptoms may also be signs of depression or anxiety, which can be made worse by long-term stress.

We are ultimately the ones who will have to take charge of our stress. There are steps you can take to help you manage and handle stress in a positive way. Managing stress is about taking charge. Taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment and the way you deal with problems. Stress management teaches us to change the stressful situation when we can, changing our reaction when we can't, taking care of our self and making time to relax.

Become a problem solver by making a list of things that are causing you stress. Figure out which problems you can solve now and which ones are beyond your control for the moment. Start solving the little ones, calmly look at the problem, think of possible solutions and take action. Being able to solve the small problems gives us confidence to tackle bigger ones.

Set limits. When it comes to work and family, figure out what you can really do. There are only so many hours in the day. Set limits for yourself and others. Don't be afraid to ask for help and to say No to requests for your time and energy when you feel overwhelmed.

Get organized. Think ahead about how you're going to spend your time. Write a to-do list. Figure out what is most important and do those things first.

Learn how to relax. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response. When practiced regularly, these activities reduce the level of everyday stress and boost your ability to stay calm and collected under pressure. Take deep breathes and stretch. If you are feeling stressed taking a few deep breathes makes you breathe slower and helps your muscles relax. Stretching can also help relax your muscles and make you feel less tense.

Take time to do something for yourself. Do something for yourself regularly, such as listening to music, reading a good book or going to a movie. Take care of your body by getting enough sleep and eating right. Exercise and don't deal with stress in unhealthy ways such as drinking alcohol or using drugs.

If you feel your stress has pushed your mind/body too far and need some help getting your emotions back in balance, call COMCARE of Sedgwick County 316-660-7540. COMCARE is a licensed Community Mental Health Center and serves all Sedgwick County residents regardless of ability to pay.

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