

# Stress Less: Responding to Your Mind and Body

Presented by  
CIGNA Employee Assistance Program



# Seminar Goals

- Learn the scientific meaning of stress
- Understand the “fight-or-flight response”
- Learn how stress affects our bodies and our health
- Understand how our thoughts can cause or worsen stress
- Learn scientifically-proven methods for reducing stress
- Review the benefits of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)



# What is Stress?

“Stress is defined as a response or reaction to a stimulus. It is a complex mind/body interaction which creates a state of arousal.” –Hans Selye, MD

Stress is defined more simply as your mind and body’s response to demanding situations or events.



# The Fight-or-Flight Response

- We perceive danger
- Our body releases a flood of hormones into the bloodstream, which causes rapid heartbeat, tightening of the muscles, rise in blood pressure, rapid breathing, and sharpened senses
- This gives us increased strength and stamina, faster reaction time, and better ability to focus our attention – so we can defend ourselves or escape from danger
- *But*, we react the same way to psychological pressures, where such a response is not helpful and has some unhealthy consequences



# Signs of Too Much Stress

## ■ Mental/Emotional Signs:

- Anxiety, worry
- Lack of enjoyment of life
- Irritability
- Inability to concentrate
- Lack of interest in things

## ■ Behavioral Signs:

- Avoiding things
- Job performance problems
- Conflicts with other people
- Using medication or alcohol to cope

## ■ Physical Signs:

- Frequent illness, such as colds
- Feeling tired
- Headaches
- Chest pain, pounding heart
- Muscle aches, tension
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Stomachaches
- Sweating
- Unable to sleep well
- Reduced sex drive



# The Effects of Chronic Stress

Long-term, unresolved stress can help cause or make the following conditions worse:

- High blood pressure
- Depression
- Asthma
- Sleep difficulties
- Migraine headaches
- Skin problems (e.g., acne, psoriasis, eczema)
- Stomach and intestinal problems (e.g., gastro-esophageal reflux disease, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcerative colitis)
- Stroke
- Heart disease
- Chronic neck and low back pain
- Other pain
- Decreased immune system function so you get sick more often
- Slow recovery and healing after disease or injury



# The Role of Thoughts in Stress

Negative Thoughts → Negative Emotions

- Thoughts and images of *potential danger or misfortune* → *fear and anxiety*
- Thoughts and images of *past losses or misfortune* → *sadness and depression*
- Thoughts and images of *injustices* → *anger*



# Strategies for Reducing Stress

1. Tackle the stressor, the external event that is stressing you
  - Time management skills
  - Assertiveness skills
  - Conflict resolution techniques
  - Debt counseling
2. Manage your reaction to the stressor, control your fight-or-flight response
  - Healthy self-talk
  - Mindfulness practice
  - Relaxation techniques
  - Visualization/guided imagery



# How Important Is It?... Can I Change It?

Is It Important?

		Is It Important?	
		Yes	No
Is It Changeable?	Yes	A	B
	No	C	D

Is It  
Changeable?



# Mindfulness

- Being fully present, focused in the here and now
- Noticing your breathing and how your body is feeling
- Noticing and accepting all thoughts without judgment, then refocusing on your breathing
- Breaks the chain between negative thought and negative emotion
- Avoids the unwinnable inner battle of trying to stop your thoughts



# Healthy Self-Talk

- I'll be all right; I can do this.
- It's easier once you get started.
- Tomorrow I'll be through it.
- Worrying won't help anything
- Take it step by step.
- I can only do my best.
- It's OK to make mistakes.
- I'll keep my mind on the task, not on fears or "what ifs."



# Relaxation Response

- Progressive relaxation techniques
- Deep breathing techniques
- Meditation
- Guided imagery, visualization
- Eastern practices such as yoga and Tai Chi



# Increase Positivity in Your Life

- Develop healthy distractions
- Engage your senses in pleasurable activities
- Get out in nature
- Fully enjoy your positive experiences
- Recognize the things your are grateful for in life



# Benefits of the Employee Assistance Program

- Face to Face Sessions
- Confidential
- Prepaid
- Unlimited Telephonic consultation
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Household benefit
- Work/Life Support such as eldercare, childcare and pet care.
- Financial Services
- Legal Services



# References

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