

Managing Physical Reactions of Stress

During challenging times, many individuals have physical symptoms in response to the stress they are experiencing. Physical signs may include fatigue, sleep problems, frequent illness, tight neck and shoulders, headaches, fatigue, gastrointestinal upset and teeth grinding.

Two of the most common ways that stress manifests itself in the body are sleep disturbance and muscle tension. Following are some constructive approaches to help you manage these symptoms.

Sleep Disturbance

Do not fight, resist or fear sleeplessness or you will make it worse

The less you worry about your sleep and keep on functioning as best you can, the better your chances are for falling asleep.

If you have lost sleep, avoid trying to “catch up” with naps

As much as possible, stay awake during the day. Go to bed and wake up at your usual times. Keep to the pattern that typically works for you, even if it is shortened from time to time.

Don't try to make yourself sleep

If you are unable to sleep after 30 minutes in bed, get up and engage in a relaxing activity such as reading or having a cup of herbal tea. Return to bed when you feel sleepy.

Do not panic about your loss of sleep

While we all tend to feel better after a good night's sleep, we can usually function on less sleep for a limited period of time. Relax and see the disruption in sleep as limited to time and circumstances, and something you will get beyond. If you continue to have trouble sleeping, consult your doctor.

Reduce caffeine consumption as much as possible

If you must have coffee, have it only in the morning.

Muscle Tension

Shoulder exercise

For shoulder tension, drop your shoulders down, let your arms fall loose, and tilt your head gently from side to side then forward and backward.

Deep breathing

Inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five. Exhale slowly and then repeat a few times. Repeat a few times until some tension is released.

Walking and other exercise

Exercise is one of the most effective methods for relieving stress and muscle tension. A brisk walk around the block is a fast and easy way to release pent-up tension. You can use other doctor approved exercise regimens that work for you.

Proper workstation ergonomics

When our muscles are tense we can be more vulnerable to repetitive strain injury. Make sure you are using proper ergonomics and taking regular breaks from repetitive motion, such as keyboarding.

Break away

Take short intermittent breaks or rest periods. Breaks give you an emotional breather. You may get up and walk around the office or sit at your desk, close your eyes and imagine a peaceful scene, e.g., a beach with the waves rolling in.

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