

Stress Management: Identifying Your Stressors

We all experience stress – but there is a difference between normal daily stress and chronic stress that can cause medical issues. You might not even realize the impact chronic or ongoing stress is having on your health. To figure out if stress is a problem for you, breakdown what’s happening in your life.

“You must first accurately identify what the factors are, what the problems are, what your particular stressors are.”

You can do this by taking a “Stress Inventory.”

“It’s not a bad idea to even write down a stress journal so you can understand what are the things that are causing you to react adversely to stress. That way you’re reducing the free-floating anxiety that you might be having. You’re kind of capturing those thoughts that are swirling around.”

That journal or list would include anything that you worry about on a daily basis, such as work, family, health or financial issues. Also include things that are regular stressors for you, like rush hour traffic. Julia Wachuta makes a list when she feels overwhelmed. A junior in college, Julia says remembering everything she has to do for school can cause a lot of stress.

“A list of tasks, you know, this week this is what I have to do A, B, C, D, E, F and all the assignments. And then I would write the days of the week on the next page and then I would say, okay, what do I have to get done today?”

Julia tackles things one at a time. Another technique that can help with stress is figuring out what stressors you can change and which ones you can’t.

“What are the constructive strategies and coping skills to make things better and to be more effective in coping with the stressors in your life.”

Finding the right coping skills, strategies and solutions can ease some of the burden of stress. For example - if you’re having a problem at work, talking to your boss about it might help you both come up with a solution. A busy mom might find some “me” time, a regular break from the kids even once a week can make all the difference in reducing her stress.

“It’s important not to overtax ourselves and attempt to be superman or superwoman. So, I think it’s crucial to be able to set some limits in our lives.”

Here are a few warning signs that your stress may be moving from normal to chronic: Headaches; Muscle tension or back pain; An upset stomach; A racing heart or chest pain; Trouble sleeping; Eating too much or too little; Problems concentrating or forgetting things; Irritability, anger, depression, or anxiety.

For fire department lieutenant Zach Zimmer, stress is part of the job.

“Every time we go out the door on a call, it’s because something bad is happening and that can really build up over time.”

To make sure all that stress doesn’t turn into a more serious problem, Zach’s department has a special peer support program. Zach also turns to exercise to relieve stress, serving as a leader on his department’s peer fitness team.

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“It’s important to have that release whether it’s exercise or just some other method for people because it’ll build up in you. And the next thing you know, you’re going off on things you don’t intend to. You’re taking it out on your coworkers and your family.”

Whether it’s part of your job or something happening at home, it’s important for everyone to understand what their stressors are. If you feel you need help dealing with the stress in your life, talk to a mental health professional.