

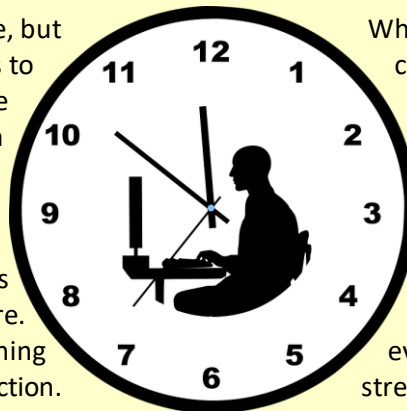
Stress and Mental Health



Stress is a very important part of our health overall. According to Stats Canada (2020) approximately 20% of Canadians feel most days are quite or extremely stressful for them. The number of people experiencing this high level of stress also seems to be increasing. Having a great deal of stress can wreak havoc on our mental health and our physical health as well. Join us in this newsletter as we work to better understand stress, recognize when it becomes a problem, and consider what we can do when stress is overwhelming us.

What is Stress?

We have all felt stress before, but providing a definition can help us to be more specific about what we are talking about. Stress is a term describing emotional or psychological strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances. Stress is our body's reaction to pressure. It signals our body that something requires attention or action.



When we feel stressed, hormones course through our bodies, triggering physiological changes. Chronic or high levels of stress can contribute to a number of problems including heart disease, headaches, mood problems including depression, gastrointestinal problems, and even premature death. Problematic stress is a very prevalent issue.

Stress Can be Good!

Stress certainly gets a bad rap, and in many ways it may be justified, but it's important to remember that stress is extremely important in our lives and actually can be very helpful to us. Stress puts pressure on us to solve problems. It provides us with very potent motivation to get things done. Without it we would lack drive and focus.



Stress and Catholicity

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4)

Stress can make us strong. It can make us competent. Through stress we learn to take action during tough times. A life without stress would be a life without challenge; and we would lack perseverance.

When does Stress Become Too Much?



We've heard the term "all things in moderation", and this is a helpful way to view stress. At optimal levels stress helps us to be as productive as possible. Too much for too long though, and we can become crippled by stress.

If your body is struggling to manage high stress levels you may experience headaches, muscle tension, jaw and teeth pain, disrupted sleep and appetite, irritability, and more.



What Can We do to Reduce Stress?

Work it Out

Most of our newsletters note the importance of exercise because of its many benefits to our physical and mental health. With stress, exercise can boost our endorphins which helps to counteract the effects of cortisol, our stress hormone.

Sleep on It

The value to our bodies of proper sleep cannot be overstated. In terms of stress, sleep helps calm, rest, and restore our body. This not only helps reduce cortisol and lessen some of the negative effects of stress, it helps us be prepared, make better decisions, and improves our coping.

Eat your Veggies

Eating habits may have more of an effect on stress levels than you realized. A poor diet can increase our sensitivity to stress. Although some less healthy foods may provide temporary relief, they can contribute to increased stress in the longer term.

Be Mindful

Orient yourself to the here and now by practicing mindfulness. Stress often involves a lot of rumination, perhaps about something that's already happened or something that is impending (like a deadline). Mindfulness can help to stop this.

Use Some Self Talk

When we are stressed, we are more likely to have negative or scary thoughts. "I can't do this. I can't cope." Consider reframing these into a question: "How can I cope?" or simply add: "I'm having the thought that..." to the bothersome thought.

Rework the To-Do List

It may seem obvious, but sometimes we put so much pressure on ourselves to get tasks done during the day that we forget to take stock of the list itself to make sure having the tasks completed is actually important to us. We may need to give ourselves permission to let things go.

Seek Counselling

Everyone experiences stress, and our stress level is a very good reason to seek counselling. There are many small changes we can make in our lives, through our thinking, routines, and coping strategies that will help with our stress. A counsellor can support us with this.

Ask your Doctor

Your doctor could play an important role in your stress management. Stress can also contribute to a number of physical symptoms which can progress to become medical problems. Involving your doctor can help make sure your health is in good order.