

STRESS MANAGEMENT

6 Rx's for Managing Work-Life Stress

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Are you a candidate for serious, irreversible health problems? The following is a "Vulnerability Scale," *The Stress Audit*, developed by stress management experts Lyle H. Miller and Alma Dell Smith. Assess your current stress levels. Be honest in your answers.

LIFESTYLE SURVEY

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------|------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------|
| Always | Almost Always | Sometimes | Almost Never | Never |

1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.
2. I get seven to eight hours of sleep at least four nights a week.
3. I give and receive affection regularly.
4. I have a least one relative within 50 miles on whom I can rely.
5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.
6. I smoke less than half a pack of cigarettes a day.
7. I take fewer than five alcoholic drinks a week.
8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.
9. I have an income adequate to meet basic expenses.
10. I get strength from my religious beliefs.
11. I regularly attend club or social activities.
12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.
13. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth).
14. I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters.

15. I am able to speak openly about feelings when angry or worried.
16. I have regular conversations with people I live with about domestic problems, e.g. chores, money, and daily living issues.
17. I do something for fun at least once a week.
18. I am able to organize my time effectively.
19. I drink fewer than three cups of caffeine (coffee, tea, cola) a day.
20. I take quiet time for myself during the day.

| | |
|-------|---------------|
| _____ | Subtotal |
| — 20 | (subtract 20) |
| _____ | |
| _____ | Total Score |

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Interpretation: 0—24: Slightly Vulnerable</p> <p>25—49: Somewhat Vulnerable</p> <p>50—75: Seriously Vulnerable</p> <p>Above 75: Extremely Vulnerable</p> |
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What do you think when you hear the word stress? Experts say it's simply the way you react physically or emotionally to change. Change can either be positive or negative, and the way you experience stress will determine its positive or negative impact on your body.

POSITIVE STRESS

When stress is a positive influence, called eustress, it can help your concentration, focus, performance, and can often help you to reach peak efficiency. Many people do their best work under pressure. There is an increase in adrenaline which increases blood flow, heightens senses, and increases focus. After the challenge has been met, people who enjoy the positive effects of stress take time to relax and enjoy their achievements. This "relaxation response" helps build up physical and emotional reserves necessary to meet the next challenge.

NEGATIVE STRESS

Stress turns negative (distress) when people stay "keyed up" and don't (or can't) relax after meeting the challenge. The secretion of ACTH in the blood affects the smooth muscles of the body, makes the skin thicker, and the body tighter. This type of stress prepares the body to defend itself, but is counterproductive as it decrease's the body's

mobility. Without relief, this is the stress that kills.

There are many tools available for managing negative (dis)stress. Here are 6 Rx's for stress management:

1. RESPONSIBILITY

Take responsibility for your personal care by being in control, establishing priorities, and learning to say "No." Don't expect others to be the care-givers or tell you when you've reached your limits. Know when enough is enough and don't blame others for being overwhelmed. You're in control of your life so be response-able!

2. REFLECTION

Take time to know yourself. Know your stress triggers, hot buttons, be aware of your personal stress symptoms, and check your work-life balance. A balanced life invests time in family, career, social relationships, recreation, spiritual development, physical/health, financial well-being (saving for the future), and mental activities (reading, learning) everyday, or at least once a week. It's not the amount of time that's important, but the quality of time invested in these areas that matters most. Two hours of quality family time on a Sunday can work wonders during a hectic week.

3. RELAXATION

Do something good for you. Give yourself some time each day to recharge your batteries—mediate, go for a walk, deep breathe for a minute. Schedule "worry time" and chances are you won't have time for it! Schedule "time out" for yourself everyday. Make an appointment with yourself to relax and keep it. And don't forget to breathe. Under stress breathing generally becomes shortened and faster, only adding to the stress. Take longer breaths and your body will relax more when under stress.

4. REFUELING

Food is a powerful drug. It can hurt you or heal you. In stressful times, it's especially important to eat a well-balanced diet high in fiber, low in salt, and low in cholesterol. Sugar, caffeine, fats, processed foods, and nicotine are food poisons and greatly increase

stress levels. Drink eight glasses of water everyday to eliminate toxins. Chemical stress combines with mental stress to create structural stress.

5. RELATIONSHIPS

Maintain and manage supportive relationships while improving your relationship with yourself! Be kind to yourself and be kind to others. You'll be amazed at what comes back to you. Your body will be there for you as well as those with whom you are supportive. Studies in the "science of happiness" have found that most people receive the greatest satisfaction from a sense of connection with other people. Be sure your connections are positive and nurtured. You can't expect to have friends if you don't invest time in keeping them.

6. RECREATION

Recreation literally means to re-create your self. How will you renew or reinvent yourself? For many, it's a resolution to have fun, laugh, and enjoy life every day. Life is too short to postpone your enjoying it *now*. Avoid the "Someday I'll" ...syndrome—someday I'll be happy. Life is only a series of moments strung together. At the end of it all, what will be said about your life? S/he was a hard worker? Will you have enjoyed your time on earth? How we re-create ourselves is a personal choice, but for many it comes from connecting with others in positive ways, balancing work with our personal life, having a hobby, playing sports, engaging in worthwhile, meaningful activities, or being creative. What would you most want to be remembered for? Decide what that is and be that person now! Every day is an opportunity to re-create yourself and increase your personal enjoyment.

Contact Lorna Riley for a complete list of training programs and speeches:

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