

Dealing with the

stress

of it all.

by Dr. Kimit Singh

In this most unavoidable mortal experience, 40% of women complain of being “stressed out.”

A woman's role in society has evolved, and we are constantly trying to keep up -- or in most cases, surpass our male counterparts. But in this so called “evolution,” we still have to tend to our basic caretaking responsibilities, in most cases. Not only are we handling the basic necessities at home, but we take on many roles that branch out of the home. These days, those responsibilities are not limited to work. This is the era of multi-tasking with no end in sight. We have our iPhones and Google calendars to keep us accountable on what we are supposed to be doing at each moment. Does it ease the stress of our lives? Yes, in many ways, but that doesn't stop us from feeling the stress of daily over-committments.

Stress is a response to our daily life. It can overwhelm us physically, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. When was the last time you felt tired or had a headache or body ache? The reason was more than likely stress. Other common physical symptoms that we see resulting from stress are high blood pressure, stomach problems, and sleep issues.

Cognitively, problems in concentration and memory may surface as a result of stress. Emotionally, common symptoms include depression, irritability, anxiety, panic, anger, and poor self-esteem. Ultimately, we do not adapt well behaviorally to the pressures of stress. Our relationships with our loved ones become strained. We start to use, or increase the use of, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, or even drugs, to deal with the increased stress. In more cases than not, our diets deteriorate, and our whole system of caring for ourselves becomes vulnerable.

How do we deal? Start sensibly. Targeting behaviors that exacerbate or worsen our state of being may be a simple way to start making changes for the better. Alcohol, food, and such bad behaviors as smoking and drug use may ease our stress and get us to “deal,” but, in the end, cause more harm than good.

Eat healthy. Grabbing the fruit instead of the candy bar will go a longer way in providing energy for that stressful day, not to mention avoiding the added health issues. Exercise should be a key component in making a change. Make reasonable goals. For example, trying to exercise five days per week for two hours is not realistic, especially

if you are already short on time. Set reasonable goals, and increase those endorphins (those natural happy surges) in your body.

Reduce your stressors and learn to be assertive and say no. When was the last time your weekend was busier than the week? Do you have to go to every party and sing happy birthday five times on a Saturday? Take a break. Smell the roses. Sitting outside and sweltering in the heat may do you more good than running around and trying to make it to the next commitment at 2 p.m.; manage your time, and simplify your life. Take advantage of the devices that rule our day and block off free time. Know your limits. There is no harm in saying no or asking favors of your friends to ease stress.

Relax every day. Set aside time to pamper yourself and decompress. It can provide your mind, body, and soul the much deserved break it needs. Meditation, deep breathing exercises, listening to music, or a quiet, hot bath can be just as good as a retreat to an island paradise.

More than anything, believe in yourself. Positive thoughts

go a long way. Having a healthy self-esteem puts things into perspective. You are your biggest cheerleader. Hand in hand with increasing your self-esteem is being realistic. You are human. Scale down your goals and expectations. You might actually surpass them if you take a break or ease off for a while.

“More than anything, believe in yourself.”

While all of these techniques can help tremendously, sometimes outside help is needed. Counseling or therapy is a great way to recognize and deal with stress. It helps us point out where the pitfalls are occurring. It also provides us with an outside lifeline that gives us a different perspective.

It is important to recognize when you need help. Always feel comfortable with talking to your doctor, and obtain a proper screening for health conditions, including mood disorders. Don't think that you are over-reacting. It's better to get help early on rather than to let the problem get worse. Studies show that the earlier you intervene, the better the outcomes are later. Then, there is a lesser chance for additional health problems. Take control of your life and find the time to rejuvenate.

“The time to

relax

is when you don't have time for it.”

- Sydnee J. Harris