Healthy Living

Manage Stress

If you are having difficulty coping with the demands in your life, you are experiencing stress. Most of us like some challenges; however, too much stress creates problems in our lives. If you are concerned about too much stress in your life, read the information below.

How do I know if I have too much stress?

- If you have too much stress in your life, your body will let you know. Stress may be experienced in different ways. Some things you may notice include:
  - difficulty concentrating
  - feelings of worry and fear
  - muscle tension
  - sweaty palms
  - heart pounding
  - irritability toward others
  - exhaustion
- If you are overly stressed over a long period of time, it can put your health at risk.
- If you or someone you know is in an emotional crisis, you can call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK.

How can I better manage my stress?

- **Learn problem solving skills.** Improving your problem solving skills can help you cope. Your health care team may offer a class or information sessions on problem solving.
- **Practice relaxation training.** Learning relaxation and mindfulness can help you manage stress. Daily relaxation may protect you from the impact of stress on your body. You can find self-help books on relaxation at libraries and book stores. Your health care team may offer relaxation or mindfulness training.

A Better Way to LIVE

Talk with your health care team about your goals.

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- **Be physically active.** Take a brisk walk or engage in other physical activities. Regular physical activity is best (see the Be Physically Active handout).
- **Learn to express yourself.** Learning to share your thoughts and feelings in an assertive and respectful manner can help reduce stress. Ask your health care team for guidance.
- **Manage your time.** Make a list of what you need to get done. Then make plans for addressing the issues on the list, and stick to the plan.
- **Practice positive thinking.** Stress is often associated with negative and self-critical thinking. Focus your attention on positive thoughts about yourself, your favorite songs, poems, prayers, or hobbies. Think about things you are grateful for.
- **Plan pleasant activities.** Make time for fun. Plan regular, enjoyable activities and see if this reduces your stress.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov
- Veterans Crisis Line: www.VeteransCrisisLine.net
- VA Mental Health Services: www.mentalhealth.va.gov
- Manage Stress*: http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=45
- The American Psychological Association Health and Wellness tips*: http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-smarts.aspx

* Indicates that the link leads to a non-VA website. The VA is not responsible for content on the site.

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.

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