

## Coping Strategies for Managing Our Stress

Coping successfully with everyday stressors as they occur will leave more time and energy for life's activities, and provide you with some extra coping reserves. If allowed to build up, those everyday stressors will eventually get you down.

### **The best time to deal with stress is the moment you first recognize some of its signals:**

- Breaking out in a sweat
- Rapid heartbeat
- Rapid or shallow breathing, or holding your breath
- Becoming irritable and impatient
- Muscular tension; i.e. shoulders drawn up, clenched fists, tight jaw, pursed lips

### **Prevent the buildup of stress by taking immediate steps:**

- Analyze the situation: *Why am I getting tense and anxious?*
- Force yourself to smile both inwardly and outwardly, even if only slightly.
- Take two or three slow, deep breaths, consciously relaxing your shoulders, mouth and jaw each time you exhale
- Say to yourself, *With a calm mind and relaxed body I can handle this.* Also, try this effective technique: *My mouth will smile, my eyes will sparkle, my mind is alert . . . . Take a slow deep breath in and slowly exhale . . . . my body is calm?*
- Ask yourself: *Is there anything I can do about this?* If not, then why waste time and energy getting upset.
- Ask yourself: *Is this really worth getting stirred up about? What difference will it make tomorrow? A week from now? A month?*
- When possible, get some quick physical activity to help normalize your body's chemistry. At least do a few stretching exercises, and then make a conscious effort to relax the your body.
- Express your feelings. Do not keep them all bottled up, but express them in a non-aggressive manner. Then dwell on them no longer, forgive and forget.
- If you have made a mistake, goofed, really blown it; admit your error and get it over with. Accept the fact that you are not infallible, and then move on.
- If the situation requires some action, do it now. Do not procrastinate. If necessary, write your plan of action down, and then forget about it until you can put it into effect.
- Take a mini-vacation. Sit back and imagine some favorite spot for five minutes. Feel that sun and breeze, smell the fresh air and flowers, listen to the hum of the insects. Experience it as if you were right there.
- Get busily involved with some activity you can easily handle and/or feel good about.

## Thoughts about Stress

How we perceive a situation and how we react to it is the basis of our stress. If you focus on the negative in any situation, you can expect high stress levels. However, if you try and see the good in the situation, your stress levels will greatly diminish.

Stress is not what happens to us: It's our **RESPONSE TO WHAT HAPPENS**. *And our **RESPONSE** is something we can choose.*

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.

Sometimes when people are under stress, they hate to think, and it's the time when they most need to think.

The components of anxiety stress, fear, and anger do not exist independently of you in the world. They simply do not exist in the physical world, even though we talk about them as if they do.

Stress is nothing more than a socially acceptable form of "mental illness."

Stress is the spice of life.

*"Things could be a lot worse, the stress of the situation always could be worse, but I am alive and I have a lot to be thankful for – so I shall not waste my days with stress and frustrations- Life is way too short!"*

Pressure and stress are the common cold of the psyche . . . . .

**John A. Romas, MPH, PhD, LPC** is professor and chair within the Department of Health Science, Minnesota State University, Mankato. In addition to his background in health education and promotion, Dr. Romas has experience in counseling psychology and career development. He has worked as a public school teacher/ administrator, public health administrator/educator, state health consultant, and small business manager. He is a well-known speaker, presenter and health consultant for educational organizations, government, health care, business and industry in the areas of personal performance, stress reduction, managing change, and health promotion. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor with the State of MN Board of Behavioral Health.