Managing Stress, Creating Balance

Stress affects all areas of life, including our physical, emotional and mental well-being. People experiencing stress may find themselves acting in less than helpful or productive ways in response to the stress.

It is important to note that individuals under chronic stress who also are predisposed to depression or who have had a previous depressive episode, are more likely to have an episode of depression. Also, some people under stress exhibit signs of anxiety. Irritability and anger outbursts are also common responses to stress. All of this underscores the importance of developing a comprehensive stress management plan.

To manage the many effects of stress, especially chronic stress, we must intervene at all levels through positive stress coping. By doing so, we will also have the opportunity to create balance in our lives. In other words, managing stress in positive life-affirming ways can actually make us healthier and happier.

The first step to learning about stress & its effects is to identify the challenges & stressors of your life. Stressors can be either internal or external.

- **Internal** stressors include lack of physical well-being, negative thinking and critical self-talk.
- Managing negative thinking is an essential component of stress management because as our thinking about a stressor becomes more negative, our negative stress response intensifies. Negative thinking can also trigger the fight or flight response.
- **External** stressors are the “people, places & things” of life. These are the things we normally associate with stress.

Once you have identified stress triggers and negative thinking in those situations, you can identify your unique stress warning signs. Please review the “When to Get Help” document to learn about the wide range of stress warning signs people may experience.

As you can see, there are four main categories of stress warning signs, including physical, emotional, mental and behavioral. Identifying these is extremely important, because they will help you be more aware when you are experiencing stress. This is an essential step in beginning to do something different in response to stress.

Next, choose which stress warning signs apply to you. You may want to rate each of your warning signs according to how soon they occur.

- ‘1’ for the earliest warning signs (ex: sweaty palms, short breaths, racing heart)
- ‘2’ for the warning signs that come on in the middle of the process (ex: irritability, muscle twitches, inattentiveness)
- ‘3’ for the latest warning signs (ex: stomach problems, headaches, apathy)
Thus far, you’ve identified the stressors in your life, as well as the warning signs that you are becoming stressed. Now we can move on to identifying what to do to manage stress. Remember that in the process of developing a comprehensive stress management plan, you will naturally be creating more life balance.

Next, identify which coping skills you’d like to try and what you are willing to begin doing within the next month. Choose from the items on the “Creating Balance” document. Remember to choose from each of the four columns. Include things that you may already be doing that help you.

Whenever attempting to make a change in one’s life, it is important to utilize the “3 P’s”….

**practice, patience and persistence.**
- **Practice** – Adding a new behavior or changing an attitude requires repetition. So, practice, practice, practice.
- **Patience** – Be patient with yourself. Making a change is not easy and it takes time. Go at whatever rate of change is best for you. The most important thing is that you stick with it at a pace that works for you.
- **Persistence** – Sticking with it, refusing to give up, and committing to your well-being are all ways of being persistent in change. Even if you get knocked off track by life events, you can get back with your program of positive change. Be persistent!

Finally, there are times when anyone of us may need extra help in managing stress, creating life balance or addressing a personal issue. For you, help is a simple phone call away. Contact **Aurora EAP (800-236-3231)** to talk with an EAP counselor or to learn about the EAP Work-Life Services program.