

Reduce stress for happier, healthier new year

The holidays are over but for many, there's plenty of stress left behind.

Stress can result from any sort of change, even a positive one. It can result from on-going pressures of work, finances, family and relationships; or it can arise from situations that are difficult or hard to control.

Understanding the things that cause you stress, and planning ways to deal with them, can make life healthier and more enjoyable.

Stress is caused by your body's natural instinct to defend itself. While that's a good thing when you are in danger, it can take a toll on your health when it goes on too long in response to life's daily challenges.

Acute stress is an immediate reaction to a threat, challenge or scare. Chronic stress results from on-going issues or problems in life; it is often the build-up of a number of smaller things.

While mild stress can be beneficial – it can spur you to action, motivate or energize you -- persistent stress can lead to a number of health problems including:

- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Sleeplessness
- Muscle aches
- Poor concentration
- Chest pain or shortness of breath
- Irritability
- Loss of appetite

It can make it difficult to manage daily tasks or get work done. Chronic stress can also lower your resistance to illness.

Staying physically, mentally and emotionally healthy requires recognizing stress and finding ways to minimize it. You can help manage the stress in your life by taking the following steps.

* Make a list of the things that cause you stress. If you can't control a stressful event,

think about how you might control the way you react to it.

- * Try not to worry about things you can't control, like the weather or other people's decisions. Look at your lifestyle and see what you CAN control to help make you more comfortable, secure and relaxed.
- * Try to look at change as a positive challenge, not a threat. Remind yourself of your strengths and successes.
- * Use relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, deep breathing or massage.
- * Get moving. Activity will help relieve pent-up energy and tension and help you feel more relaxed.
- * Eat healthy foods and limit your alcohol intake.
- * Get enough rest.
- * Tackle one task at a time and don't strive for perfection. Don't get overwhelmed by trying to do too much at once.
- * Set limits. Learn to say “no” to things that are not a priority.
- * Let go of your expectations for perfection. Let your holiday plans and activities take shape without expecting perfection in everything you do.
- * Get away from stressful situations for a while -- read a book, watch a movie, play a game, listen to music.
- * Share what you feel. Confide in a family member or close friend.
- * Keep a good attitude. Try to focus on the positive in your life.
- * Have some fun. Talk, laugh and play. Spend time with people you enjoy.

Find the stress-reducing strategies that work for you, and incorporate them into your life every day.

You'll feel good doing what's good for you!

For more information on stress and other health and wellness issues, log on to

www.healthyhenrycounty.org

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