

Stress management



Left unmanaged, stress, regardless of its type or source, can result negative physical and mental health consequences. Just as it is helpful to recognize both the types and sources of stress and the signs and symptoms of stress reactions, it is helpful to be informed about effective strategies and techniques for managing stress.

Because stress affects us both physically and mentally, it is important to manage stress management with a balanced and blended approach. General recommendations for active stress management include a range of different behaviors. The concept of active stress management is based on the idea that stress management activities should begin before an individual begins to experience the signs and symptoms of stress, and be ongoing.

GENERAL STRESS MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

EXERCISE

Physical exercise is a key to remaining strong and healthy, as well as to relieving tension. Even twenty minutes each day of physical activity that involves the whole body and raises respiration and heartbeat, will have benefits.

Physical and mental fitness go together. The qualities of strength, flexibility and reliability in one's physical being translate to mental attitudes as well. Twenty minutes is a small investment for a significant improvement in energy and well-being.

NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is always important, but in remote locations is a challenge as to both the content and timing of healthy balanced meals. Skipping meals, forgetting to drink fluids, and overdoing on sugar, fatty snacks and alcohol can create nutritional stress. Attention to healthy eating is critical to maintaining physical and mental health, as well as tolerating and managing stress.

REST AND SLEEP

Sleep requirements vary among individuals, but demands of field work can lead to fatigue and exhaustion unless monitored. Individuals are responsible for keeping themselves adequately rested. Despite changes in life-style while in the field, it is important to try to establish routines that allow for adequate sleep as well as periodic rest at, near or away from work sites.

RELAXATION

Relaxation and healthy pleasures are individually chosen to meet individual needs for time out and a brief shift of focus away from the demands of work. Music, games, cooking for pleasure, and contact with nature are sources of relaxation for many people. Activities like those above allow people to restore themselves and manage stress at the same time.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A balance of work and private life is important in managing stress. This applies to routine at the field assignment, but should also encompass planned for time off away from work. No one should feel essential to the team twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Knowing when to allocate time for yourself and your family is as important as budgeting your time well on the job.

STRESS MINIMIZERS

- Identify the major stress factors in your life
- Learn how to manage your time well
- Eat a well-balanced diet related to your activity level
- Accept creative challenges
- Spend time with family and friends
- Learn either to accept what you cannot change, or to get out of a situation that is too stressful for you
- Make sure to get all the sleep you need
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol, caffeine and nicotine
- Use your free time constructively
- Learn to be assertive but not aggressive
- Exercise at least three times a week for endurance and strength
- Know and practice your philosophical/spiritual approach to life
- Learn the healing value of relaxation and meditation

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

Exposure to traumatic or threatening events creates a different type of stress response and are best managed by different strategies and techniques used in managing other forms of stress. Both professional help and methods of self-help can be effective in managing critical incident stress reactions. Several of the methods of help described can be used together to help manage the impact of a powerful event.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

A number of group techniques have been developed by professionals to assist emergency services personnel, such as ambulance drivers and firefighters, to deal with critical incident stress. You are strongly advised to attend the sessions available at your duty station. The following descriptions can give you an idea of what these sessions provide.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

Psychological first aid is a 'humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support. It is an approach to helping people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event. It includes basic principles of support to promote natural recovery. Psychological first aid aims to reduce initial distress, meet current needs, promote flexible coping and encourage adjustment

Usually provided in the immediate wake of a violent or traumatic event, psychological first aid can be thought of as a form of "buddy care" or emotional support offered to the affected staff member by others who are right on scene or quickly able to respond. Psychological first aid (PFA) is as natural, necessary and

accessible as medical first aid. Psychological first aid is no more complicated than assisting people with emotional distress resulting from an accident, injury or sudden shocking event.

The purpose of psychological first aid is to help stabilize the emotional impact of the incident, provide support and basic needs, and connect the affected individual with information and resources to manage the emotions and behaviors resulting from the experience.

SELF-HELP DO'S AND DON'TS

The following list of suggested "do's and don'ts" are provided to help you get the maximum benefit from critical incident stress management strategies.

DO'S

Expect the incident to bother you

Remind yourself that your reactions are normal

Get plenty of sleep and rest

Spend time with family, friends and colleagues

Maintain a balanced diet with minimum caffeine and sugar

Exercise daily in a moderate basis

Take time for leisure activities

Learn as much as possible about critical incident stress

Talk to trusted family, friend, counsellor

Minimize use of alcohol and drugs

Treat yourself especially well

DON'TS

Think you are going crazy

Try to resist recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks

Withdraw from family, friends, colleagues

Think you are the only one who has been affected

Drink alcohol excessively

Abuse medication

When helping others after a critical incident

Listen carefully

Spend time with the affected person

Offer your assistance and listening ear

Reassure them that they are safe and that their reactions are normal

Help them with routine tasks like cleaning, cooking and caring for the family

Allow them some private time

Do not take their anger (or other feelings) personally

Tell them you are sorry such an event has happened and you want to understand and help them

Call for help or support as soon as you feel you need it