

# Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

# NEWSLETTER

## Calm Down ... and Relax

Owen G. McKenzie, ACSW, CEAP

Everybody talks about being stressed out today. Certainly there is enough stress to go around. Some stress is actually good for people and good for organizations. The trick is not to reach and run at overload.

Organizations are concerned with stress for a variety of reasons. Organizations take some responsibility for the very fact that they do create some of this stress. Organizations are also concerned about rising stress-related illnesses. Stress also directly impacts employees' performance and the performance of the overall organization. Let's take a brief look at some insights into stress and the tools to better manage it.

There are both work and non-work stressors. Different people perceive stressors very differently. Each person's interpretation of the stressor is the key. What is stressful for one individual is not necessarily stressful for another.



### Work Stressors

Task demands: focus on the job itself, which include change and uncertainty for employees. When people feel they have no or very little control over what

they do, they experience stress. Another example is the need for quick or serious decisions with big consequences. Did you know that employees with little control over their work and heavy workloads have more heart attacks?

Role demands includes role conflict and role ambiguity. When people are not sure what is expected, we often feel stress. In some cases it is a matter of questioning one's career choice; for others it's a matter of feeling a lack of career opportunity.

Interpersonal demands include dealing with abrasive people or any conflicting personality type, sexual harassment, and difficult, conflicting leadership styles.

Physical demands create stress. Unpleasant conditions on the job including unsafe conditions or extreme temperatures often result in stress. These stressors also include unsatisfactory office conditions, including poor design, poor lighting, no privacy, noise, or even the use of computers.

### Non-work stressors

Two of the biggest non-work stressors include daycare issues and aging parents. Today's working generation is wedged between their parents and their children's care needs.

Finances can put a tremendous strain on individuals who have experienced an unforeseen burden (i.e. loss of income due to an accident or sickness). Others seem to struggle as personal money managers and repeatedly purchase (charge) things beyond their means.

Family matters from the turbulent teenager to a partner experiencing a major depression, from substance abuse to domestic violence, also raise our stress levels.

### **Stress Management**

This is a joint responsibility of the organization and the individual. For example, organizational focus can include job redesign and career management. Both of which improve the individual's control over his or her job and reduce uncertainty.

Primary individual targets include time management, optimism, and leisure activities. When you keep a positive outlook, you generally use more humor and laugh more. Learning time management including, writing a daily to-do list, which includes prioritizing these items. Spending time enjoying leisure activities gives you rest and pleasure from your work.



Secondary prevention within an organization include team-building efforts.

For individuals secondary prevention includes exercise, diet and relaxation training. Those who exercise are less

likely to get sick with common illnesses and miss less work. Exercise also tends to make people feel more self-confident and improves their mental outlook. Exercise lowers blood pressure and cholesterol. With all these benefits why not give walking 30 minutes/day a try?



A good diet provides you with better overall health. No doubt you've heard this 100 times before and we hate to bore you by stating the obvious. Minimize your sugar and high cholesterol foods – and that would include alcohol. Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables eight times a day – and don't forget the daily eight glasses of water.

***Most of the time we can handle life's difficulties on our own. However, sometimes the problems may seem a little overwhelming. Your employer provides help of this kind through your employee assistance program. Short-term problem solving or further professional counseling may help to heal the effects of stress. You can begin by confidentially calling us at 243-2643 or toll-free 800-847-9355 or by going to our website: [www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/feap/](http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/feap/).***