



HEALTH CAPSULE | No.56 | 2017

Understand your stress

What stresses you is different from what stresses your neighbour. However, the characteristics that induce a stress response are universal. For a situation to be stressful it must contain one or more of the following characteristics:

- **Novelty.** Something new you have not experienced before;
- **Unpredictability.** Something you had no way of knowing would occur;
- **Threat to the ego.** Your competence as a person is called into question;
- **Sense of control.** You feel you have little or no control over the situation.

When faced with (or anticipating) a situation that is either novel, unpredictable, threatens our ego, or lowers our sense of control (N.U.T.S.) we all secrete stress hormones. Learning to identify such situations can help to better manage stress.

Recognize the body's response to stress

Learn to listen to your body and recognize the signs when you are responding to stress.

Energy mobilization is the body's way of preparing us for a stressful situation. Here are some of the changes that occur during a stress response:

- **Cardiovascular** activities pump into action.
Your heart rate increases to pump more blood into your muscles.
Your arteries constrict to increase blood pressure.
Your veins open up to ease the return of blood to the heart.
- **Breathing** increases and deepens to allow more oxygen in your blood.
- **Senses** sharpen to keep you alert.
Your pupils dilate (enlarge) so you can see more clearly.
Your hairs stand up, making you more sensitive to touch.
You secrete endorphins, our natural pain killers that numb pain in the case of injury helping to keep you focused.
- Dry-mouth and loss of bladder and bowel control often occur.
- Sweat glands open up to cool you down.



Quick tricks to reduce your stress response very quickly

- Use your mobilized energy: take **several deep breaths**, contract and release your abdominal muscles, or flex your arm and leg muscles.
- Have regular stretch breaks. **Stretching** is simple enough to do anywhere and only takes a few seconds.



How to better cope with stress

1. We need to deconstruct stress

Listen to your body and recognize when you are responding to stress.

Take time for yourself, identify the source of stress, and try to come up with a solution or a Plan B.

2. We need to reconstruct our lives WITH stress

Find ways to reduce the impact of stress in our lives. For some this may be yoga and for others this may be high impact mountain biking.

Call up positive images and fool your stress response system.

3. We need to use our bodies

Exercise! Not only will this help your overall health, but it will also use up the energy you have mobilized when facing stress. No need to run marathons, but we need to be active. Play ball with your kids!

4. We need to see the BIG picture

By putting things into perspective and by applying these simple strategies, we are able to trick our stress response... not only is it beneficial, but it also benefits the people around us!

Source: CSHS

The joy of gift-free giving!

If your life seems already filled with material goods, why not rethink Christmas gifts? Here are a few suggestions.

- Give of your time. Cherish precious moments among family and friends or get involved in your community and volunteer.
- Donate blood.
- Donate in your friends' name to an organization of their choice.
- Invite close ones to a gourmet dinner.
- Give of your know-how. Are you a great cook? Teach a friend; share your talent.
- Offer a subscription service or enrolment to a leisure activity.
- Offer a photo session.
- Offer tickets. Concert, sports match or spa, any reason to go out is good!