

Combating Serious Stress

We all encounter daily stressors. These might include too many personal or work-related demands, family squabbles, or disgruntled customers or clients.

When faced with a highly stressful event in your life – perhaps the death of a loved one, a life-threatening illness, or a serious financial loss - some strategies work better than others in helping you to cope:

- Avoid unnecessary changes in your life. Instead, reserve what energy you do have for dealing with the stressor at hand. If possible, stabilize your work and home environments while working out the primary problem.
- Quiet your mind. In times of stress, the mind can make things seem worse than they are by creating endless versions of impending disaster. Because the body can't tell the difference between fact and fantasy, it responds with a heightened physical response.
- Stay in the present. You can calm both your mind and body by keeping your mind in the present, which is seldom as stressful as an imagined future or regrettable past. To keep your mind in the present, focus your attention on your breathing, a sound or visual pattern, a repetitive movement, or meditation.
- Courageously and aggressively face the stressor. Resist any temptation to ignore the stressor. Instead, carefully appraise the seriousness of the problem without magnifying it out of proportion. In addition, confirm your view of the stressor by talking with others. Make a special effort to speak to family,



friends, or coworkers who have dealt with similar experiences.

- Take inventory of your coping responses. Confidence is a valuable ally in combating stress, and it builds on memories of past successes. Review successes you've had with other stressful life situations. Recall some of the specific things you did to cope.
- Take action. Commit yourself to a reasonable course of action to deal with the stressor. Action is a powerful stress-reducer. Research shows the body lowers its production of epinephrine, a powerful stress hormone, when a person shifts into action.
- Take time out to relax. At least once or twice a day, take time to decompress by relaxing — perhaps by listening to soothing music, taking a walk, gardening, reading, or exercising.

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