

Remember how stressed out you or your classmates got during finals at college? Most educators will tell you that level of stress was just a little practice for the rest of your career.

Stress, itself, doesn't cause the problem. A little stress is actually good for us -- motivating us to organize and perform our duties.

Too much stress is debilitating. Your challenge is to make good choices in how you cope with the countless demands on you.

People who don't deal positively with stressful situations become ill. This occurs because the body's immune system is worn down in the fight against stressors. Migraines, ulcers, backaches, constipation, constant sore throats, high weight gain or weight loss and heart attacks are only a few of the physical consequences of inappropriate coping techniques.

Many, but certainly not all, experienced teachers have found some preventative medicine to protect you against massive stress symptoms.

- **Exercise!** You owe it to your body to shake off the day. It will revive you. A workout at the gym, a brisk walk in the leaves or a bike ride clears a mind and heals a tired body. Just do it!
- **Eat a balanced diet.** Potato chips are not really leafy vegetables. Watch your vitamin and mineral supplements. Eat wholesome foods so your body takes in all it needs. When in stress, the system calls on these nutrients for energy. If they are not available, the physiological system breaks down and you get tired or sick.
- **Do your toughest work when you are strongest.** Decide if you will arrive at work early, stay late, or take work home, but do not try to do all three. Try to do your schoolwork at school.
- **Talk out your troubles.** Find a friend, spouse, clergy person, counselor or therapist who can be a trusted listener. The problem may not go away, but talking about it can relieve tension. Talk in a private place. Venting your frustrations in a public place where you can be overheard and misunderstood will lead to more stress.
- **Recognize and accept your limits.** Most of us set unreasonable goals for ourselves. But, we can never be perfect so we often have a sense of failure or inadequacy. Re-evaluate your goals with ruthless realism. Are they really achievable? Is that what life is really all about?
- **Stop procrastinating.** Having something hanging over you can cause more tension than the project is worth. Face it and be done with it.
- **Be good to yourself.** Surprise yourself with a bubble bath or a "creative date" with your spouse, friend or child. Keep a treasure box and fill it with cards, gifts and notes your students and their parents give you. Pull it out and read through the treasures on a rough day. Play. Find hobbies that are enjoyable and that let you escape for the daily routine.
- **Plan, plan, plan and just say no!** Disorganization breeds stress. Develop your own personal style of getting things done in a calm, orderly way. Learn how to say no. You don't have to agree to serve on every committee, club and group you are asked to join.
- **Get plenty of sleep and let go of worrying.** If you are tired, go to bed early. Don't lie awake worrying about how you should have handled Joshua in class. A study shows that only 2 percent of all of the things people worry about really deserve attention. Forty percent of the

items people worry about never happen.

- ***Let yourself be a child.*** Have an art party at your house where you color or paint. Invite your colleagues over and promise not to talk about anything going on at school. Join a book group. Give yourself permission to experiment, to take risks, to try new things and to make mistakes.