

POLK
Family Caregivers



... Help Begins Here!

The Hardest Job There is

Who are we kidding? Caring for someone who is elderly or ill might just be the hardest job out there. Before you know it, your life has disappeared and you are totally fried. Tiresome though it is to hear, it really is vital to know how to manage stress and focus on creating a the best quality of life for yourself that you can.

What is stress?

Stress is a person's physical and emotional response to change. This can be positive or negative, short term or long lasting.

Why is stress harmful?

The body can deal relatively well with short term stress. Long term or chronic stress causes unrelenting wear and tear on the body. It is cumulative.

How does stress affect the body?

Stress symptoms affect each of us in a different way. Some people may experience: Palpitations, chest pain, ulcers, heartburn, diarrhea, tension headaches, aching jaw, neck/back/shoulder pain, frequent cold, cold sores or fever blisters, sleeplessness, moodiness, frequent arguments.

What does stress do to the body's systems?

- Nervous system- The reaction of this system puts the entire stress response into motion. A multitude of hormones are released to assist your body to respond to the perceived danger. The nervous system's reaction to stress can cause fear, anxiety, excitement and panic.
- Cardiovascular System- This system can react to stress with an increase in heart rate, resulting in chest pain. It may also cause blood vessel constriction resulting in decreased blood flow to the heart, increased workload for the heart and eventual heart failure. Constant presence of stress hormones creates a constant state of tension in the body that eventually results in Hypertension.
- Respiratory System- Breathing becomes rapid so the lungs can take in more oxygen. The immune system can become susceptible to infections.
- Digestive System- Due to direct effects of the hormones, diarrhea and heartburn can occur. Bloating and constipation may be a problem due to the shutdown of the digestive system as a non-essential activity in cases of acute stress.

- Skin- Blood flow is diverted away from the skin to support the heart and muscle tissues. This can result in cool, clammy, sweaty skin.
- Psychological Effects- Stress is associated with the onset of depression or anxiety.

How can I de-stress?

- Participate in relaxation exercises such as yoga, meditation, walking, stretching, etc.
- Take a break
- Work out
- Take a bath
- Count to 10
- Journal
- Listen to music
- Vent
- Pray

You have the right to:

- Put yourself first
- Make mistakes
- Speak up if you have been treated unfairly
- Feel and express pain
- ASK FOR HELP
- Ask for clarification
- Be left alone when you want to be
- Receive formal recognition
- Say "no"