



# MAKING YOURSELF AWARE

MINDFUL AWARENESS: THE FIRST STEP TO REDUCE STRESS



# Making Yourself Aware –

## Mindful Awareness: The First Step to Reduce Stress

It seems like we can't go a day without hearing "stress" or "I'm so stressed" in a sentence. We know that too much stress affects our health, and the World Health Organization has called it the health epidemic of the 21st century.

Stress can creep up on you, sometimes so easily that you may not even be aware of its effects. A number of stressors (causes of stress) are actually things in your control that you can prevent with a few helpful tips. The first important tip would be to take some time to focus on common physical and emotional signs and symptoms you may be experiencing. The second tip is to schedule some time for you to assess how your day or week went. This will help you evaluate any problems you would like to address to prevent or lessen your stress. There is plenty of information on how to manage stress with relaxation and mindful techniques. This month Thrive helps you focus on awareness, problem solving and the proactive steps you can take in preventing stress.

# Notice Signs *and* Symptoms of Stress



## Physical

- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain, rapid heart rate
- Change in sex drive
- Upset stomach, diarrhea or constipation



## Cognitive

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor judgment
- Seeing only the negative
- Racing thoughts



## Emotional (*mood*)

- General unhappiness or depression
- Anxiety and agitation
- Irritability or anger
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Lack of motivation



## Behavioral

- Overeating or undereating
- Too much or too little sleep
- Social withdrawal
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Use of alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax



# Tip 1 –

## Make note when you recognize symptoms of stress. Monitor Your Stressors

Journaling or keeping notes is an easy way to help you look for connections between stress symptoms and sources of stress. It also helps distinguish between obvious and underlying causes of stress. An example would be losing your temper if your printer jams (obvious), when you are actually under pressure to get a job done (underlying). You can use sticky notes, small notebooks, your phone or computer to journal with. Remember to look for the obvious or underlying sources of stress

### Obvious Causes of Stress

- Lost car keys.
- Late to work.
- Angry customer.
- Dawdling kids.
- Computer problems.



### Underlying Causes of Stress

- Time (deadlines, late to work).
- Finances (collections notice, rumor of RIF, argument with spouse over purchase).
- Relationships/Behavior (work reprimand, yelling at your child over minor incident).
- Disorganization (disorganized desk/workspace, closets at home are disorganized).
- Job Environment (noisy, high pressure, harassment).

*You can journal, for example:*

#### WHAT HAPPENED?

I was late to work.

#### HOW IT MADE ME FEEL?

I felt frustrated because it was preventable and my boss doesn't like when I'm late.

#### HOW I FELT PHYSICALLY?

I felt nauseated.

# Tip 2 –

Look at your notes or journal for connections and problem solve to see what action(s) are necessary to eliminate that stressor.

*E.g., traffic – leave earlier, take different route, make lunches the night before.*

## Be Aware of Your Interpersonal Communication

### Non-verbal Communication

- Body language (what you say without words).
- Active listening (focusing all senses on what is said instead of passively hearing).
- Attire (how you dress conveys not only self-expression but multiple messages that may be unintended; i.e., age, politics, professionalism).

### Verbal Communication

- What we say and how we say it (reacting vs. responding, tone of voice).
- Not texting, messaging or emailing.





## Tip 3 –

### Work on your interpersonal communication skills.

- Put down devices when speaking/listening to someone.
- Face the person, make eye contact, nod.
- Be able to repeat back what a person has said for clarification.
- Be mindful of how and what you are saying.
- Pause and consider the situation before speaking to avoid emotional reaction.

### Evaluate Your Health Habits

- How is your energy level?
- Are you getting recommended amounts of sleep (seven to eight hours)?
- Are you eating a variety of healthy options?
- Are you getting exercise or movement?

# Tip 4 –

Begin with small goals to improve sleep, eating and getting movement, then increase slowly.

- Stop caffeine intake earlier in the day.
- No devices in your bedroom.
- Begin with eating one fruit and one vegetable a day.
- Try a variety of recipes.
- Move a few minutes every hour at work.
- Walk on a break for 15 minutes a day.

## By being mindful –

Making yourself more aware of how you feel in the moment – and recognizing the obvious or underlying causes of stress, you can begin to take control and be productive in eliminating a good number of your stressors. It will always help to keep practicing relaxation techniques to aid in this process.

