



STRESS REDUCTION



■ WHAT IS STRESS AND WHAT IS ITS CAUSE?

"Stress" describes a person's response to physical, chemical, environmental or emotional factors. Stress can lead to an increase in blood pressure, overeating, and a decline in physical activity. No two people respond to life's stressors in the same way and it is difficult to define and measure our response to stress. Personality traits, our individual social and support systems, our physical environments and our workplace situations can all contribute to the unique stressors in each of our lives.

■ IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN STRESS AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE?

There is mounting evidence that there is a link between stress and cardiovascular disease, but scientists don't know if stress is an "independent" risk factor for heart disease. It may be that our reactions to stress cause physical and behavioral changes that increase our risk factors for cardiovascular disease as described above.

■ WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS?

Physical signs of stress include:

General aches and pains, racing heart, clenched jaw, headaches, indigestion/upset stomach, muscle tension, difficulty sleeping, sweaty palms, tiredness and/or exhaustion, and weight gain or loss.

Mental/emotional signs of stress include:

Poor concentration, feelings of sadness, anxiety, depression, mood swings, irritability, feelings of loneliness, negative thoughts, loss of creativity, poor memory, constant worrying, and trouble making decisions.

Behavioral signs of stress include:

Compulsive eating, increased use of alcohol or drugs, isolation or withdrawal from social interactions, frequent job changes and impulsive actions.

■ HOW CAN I REDUCE STRESS IN MY LIFE?

- Share your feelings/concerns with someone you trust.
- Seek professional counseling, if appropriate.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get enough sleep.
- Eat a healthy diet and drink sensibly.
- Find ways to relax doing things you enjoy.
- Get organized. Set realistic goals and priorities.
- Learn to say "no."

