

# Stress Management

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses. Stress is a normal part of life, and understanding how we deal with stress can improve our ability to cope with stressful situations.

## KNOW YOUR STRESSORS

Effective stress management starts with identifying **your sources of stress**, and developing strategies to manage them. One way to do this is to make a list of the situations, concerns or challenges that trigger your stress response.

*Practice:* Take a moment to write down some of the top issues you're facing right now. You'll notice that some of your stressors are events that happen to you, while others seem to originate from within.

## COPING WITH STRESS

As mentioned before, stress is an automatic response from your nervous system. Some of our stressors happen at predictable times; a disagreement with a friend, an upcoming deadline, or a difficult work project for example. When you are dealing with predictable stressors, you can either change the situation or change how you react to it. When deciding which option to choose in any given scenario, the four A's can help guide you in making your decision.

### ACCEPT

There are times when the only response is to accept things as they are. Talk about the stressors with a person you trust in order to relieve the pressure. If experiencing anger at someone, free yourself from it by forgiving the individual and moving on. Avoid negative self-talk and focus on the positive.

### AVOID

Where possible, take control of your environment in order to avoid stress. Stress can be reduced by planning ahead. Don't take on more responsibility than you can reasonably manage.

### ALTER

Shift your circumstances in some way so that the stress is reduced or eliminated. Communicate by using "I" statements when asking others to change their behavior—for example, "I feel frustrated by this heavy workload. Can you help me balance this?"

### ADAPT

Change the way you interact with the source of the stress. Redefine the need to achieve perfection in order to function with less frustration. Stop negative thoughts when they occur. Try to reframe the situation by looking at it through another person's eyes.

Remember, stress is a part of everyday life, and a small amount of stress may actually serve to motivate and energize you. The important thing is to recognize that you are never totally powerless, even in the most stressful of events. You can always make decisions that can help you to accept, avoid, alter or adapt to the stressful situations that you encounter.