

# **Stop Trying to Eliminate Stress ... Learn How to Cope With It**

***By John Guiliana, DPM, MS and  
Lynn Homisak, PRT***



**AAPP**  
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
PODIATRIC PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

10 Maple Street, Suite 301  
Middleton, MA 01949

978-646-9091

978-646-9092 fax

office@aappm.org

www.aappm.org

# **Stop Trying to Eliminate Stress...Learn How to Cope with It**

*John V. Guiliana, DPM ,MS and Lynn Homisak, PRT*

Stress is the “reaction” that our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment. It has both a physical and emotional effects on us and can create either positive or negative feelings.

As a positive influence, stress can help motivate us to action. The typical “flight or fight syndrome” serves as a life saving example of a positive reaction to stress. Adrenalin released during an acute crisis causes temporary changes in our body, allowing us a heightened response to the danger. An example of an “acute” crisis would be a fire, not a person in front of you holding 11 items in an express check-out line when the limit is 10!

As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems such as headaches, upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke.

## **How Can I Eliminate Stress from My Life?**

Positive stress (or “eustress”) adds anticipation and excitement to life, and the reality is we all thrive under a certain amount of stress. Deadlines, confrontations, and even our frustrations and sorrows add depth and enrichment to our lives. Conversely, insufficient stress acts as a depressant and may leave us feeling bored. Finding the optimal level of stress which will individually motivate but not overwhelm you is an important key to stress management. The goal is not to eliminate stress but to learn how to manage and use it.

## **How Can I Tell what is optimal stress for me?**

There is no single level of stress that is optimal for all people and according to Allen Elkin, Ph.D., Founder of the Stress Management and Counseling Center in NYC, “defining it is like nailing Jello to a tree.” We are all individuals with unique requirements. As such, what is distressing to one may be a joy to another. Even when we agree that a particular event is distressing, we are likely to differ in our physiological and psychological responses to it. Think of this in terms of riding on a roller coaster. To one, it can bring immeasurable exhilaration and pleasure....To another, anxiety and fear. Both stresses... Each perceived entirely different.

It has been found that most illness is related to unrelieved stress. Researchers estimate the 75-90% of all visits to PCP's are for stress-related conditions and 112 million people take some sort of medication to deal with stress-related symptoms. If you are experiencing stress symptoms and on the way to becoming a “statistic”, you have gone beyond your optimal stress level; you need to reduce the stress in your life and/or improve your ability to manage it.

## **How Can I Manage Stress Better?**

Healthcare professionals have unique stress levels. These levels are affected by both administrative as well as clinical stressors. Stress management involves keeping yourself recharged. When you leave your car headlights on overnight, what happens? Right...no power! You can't get to work. You can't even get out of the driveway!

Your brain is like a car battery. If you let all the charge run down, you can't function very well. Your brain tells your body that it just can't handle anything else. Keeping your mental batteries charged allows you to be more productive—both personally and professionally. When your mental batteries are fully charged, you feel more energetic and able to handle whatever comes your way-- surgical problems, annoying patients, insurance companies that delay your payments, etc.

With the increasing levels of stress placed upon us by administrative bodies, regulatory concerns, as well as patient care, we need to practice recharging exercises. Identifying unrelieved stress and being aware of its effect on your life is not sufficient for reducing its harmful effects. Just as there are many sources of stress, there are many possibilities for its management. All require work toward change: changing the source of stress and/or changing your reaction to it.

1. Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions.  
Notice your stress. Don't ignore it.  
Determine what events lead to stress.  
Determine how your body responds to the stress. Do you become psychologically or physically upset?
2. Recognize what you can change.  
Can you change your stressors by avoiding or eliminating them completely?  
Can you reduce their intensity (manage them over a period of time instead of on a daily or weekly basis)?  
Can you shorten your exposure to stress (take a break, leave the physical premises)?  
Can you devote the time and energy necessary to making a change? (goal setting and time management techniques may be helpful here)
3. Reduce the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress.  
The stress reaction is triggered by your perception of danger...physical danger and/or emotional danger.  
Are you viewing your stressors in exaggerated terms and/or taking a difficult situation and making it a disaster?  
Are you expecting to please everyone?  
Are you overreacting and viewing things as absolutely critical and urgent?  
Do you feel you must always prevail in every situation?  
Work at adopting more moderate views and try to see the stress as something you can cope with rather than something that overpowers you.  
Try to temper your excess emotions. Put the situation in perspective. Do not labor on the negative aspects and the "what if's."
4. Learn to moderate your physical reactions to stress.  
Slow, deep breathing will bring your heart rate and respiration back to normal.  
Relaxation techniques, such as yoga, can reduce muscle tension.
5. Build your physical reserves.  
Exercising for cardiovascular fitness three to four times a week will release endorphins, your bodies natural "stress busters" (moderate, prolonged rhythmic exercise is best, such as walking, swimming, cycling, or jogging).  
Eat well-balanced, nutritious meals.  
Maintain your ideal weight.  
Avoid nicotine, excessive caffeine, and other stimulants.  
Mix leisure with work. Take breaks and get away when you can.  
Get enough sleep. Be as consistent with your sleep schedule as possible.
6. Maintain your emotional reserves.  
Develop some mutually supportive friendships/relationships.

Pursue realistic goals which are meaningful to you, rather than goals others have for you that you do not share.

Try to frame things more positively. Don't jump to conclusions, become so judgmental that you can't consider another point of view.

Think realistically. Expect some frustrations, failures, and disappointments. If you don't, you set yourself up for a letdown.

Try to add HUMOR. While your "stressful" situation may seem anything BUT funny...think of how it might be handled on say, the Jerry Seinfeld Show or by Lucille Ball or someone you feel possesses the ability to make you smile. You might open yourself up to seeing "lighter" side.

Always reward yourself for achievements.

When your brain tells you that it can't handle anything else, don't give up. Take thirty minutes and re-focus. Letting your brain fizzle out with stress and frustration only leads to other problems. Recognize the little disappointments and anxieties in your life and deal with them before they grow into big ones. You can't afford to run your mental batteries down, so charge them up every once in a while by understanding and applying effective stress management techniques. Make it a point to manage your stress....before it manages you!

*Dr. Guiliana is a nationally recognized speaker and author on topics pertaining to medical practice management. He holds a Master's in Health Care Management and is a Trustee of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. He practices in Hackettstown, New Jersey.*

*Lynn Homisak, RPT is a nationally recognized speaker and author on practice management topics and is certified in podiatric radiology.*

*Together, Dr. Guiliana and Ms. Homisak are partners in SOS Healthcare Management Solutions, LLC, a podiatric management and consulting firm. They can be reached at 1-866-TEAM SOS (832-6767) or at [www.soshms.com](http://www.soshms.com).*