

Stress

Stress. We all talk about it. We all experience it.

Some of us dwell on it, blaming it for the things we'd like to do but can't--or the things we don't want to do but must. Others of us avoid it, refusing to admit it exists, steamrolling through our lives as if we didn't have a care in the world.

Here's a clue: neither of those options works well in the long run.

As the owner of two businesses, a person who travels out-of-town at least once a month to either speak or teach, a wife, a mother, a friend, an employer, and a writer--I'm an authority on stress. I've learned, however, that no matter how busy a person is, she can always manage her stress. The key is to recognize what causes it.

I can't tell you what causes your stress; none of us has the same personality and our stress triggers are as different as we are. Sometimes it's easier to expose our triggers by the symptoms they cause than by the triggers themselves. Here are a few: insomnia; crankiness; increase/decrease in appetite; binge eating; weight gain or loss (even just 5 pounds); sleeping and/or napping more than usual; getting caught up in computer games, reading, or other hobbies that allow us to escape our normal lives and activities; being late for work or other appointments; crying easily; emotional detachment, etc. If you notice yourself indulging in one or more of these behaviors, evaluate your situation: I'll bet you're stressed.

If you are handling excessive stress, find a way to relax--even if for a short time. Go for a walk. Spend a comforting hour with a friend. Visit the gym. Take a day off. Read a good book. Do something that takes you away from the cause of your stress, completely, even if for a short time.

The more stressed you are, the less effective you'll be on the job and in your personal life. Unfortunately, stress feeds on itself. When things aren't going the way we think they should, we demand more of ourselves and, as a result, wind up handicapping ourselves. None of us can prevent death, illness, relationship woes, job layoffs, natural disasters, or even bad hair days. What we can prevent is allowing these situations to consume us to the point that we exhaust our energy and coping mechanisms.

The American Institute of Stress (www.stress.org) offers a multitude of information from Job Stress to Stress Scoops and Bulletins. If stress sometimes interferes in your life, check it out!