

Resiliency in Stressful Times

Defining Stress

A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.'

What are the signs/symptoms of stress?

- Anger – short-fused, short-tempered, hostile, impatient
- Headaches
- Anxiety – need to control, avoiding activities, intolerance of uncertainty, crying difficulty managing emotions, over planning for situations, excess worry
- Stomach – heartburn, IBS, overeating, lack of appetite
- Fatigue
- Decreased sex drive
- Skin Irritations
- Muscle tension – Neck/back pain
- Apathy – lack of motivation
- Trouble concentration – difficulty completing tasks, making mistakes
- Difficulty sleeping – Insomnia, nightmares or disturbed dreams
- Frequent sickness
- Hair loss
- Weight gain – cortisol levels rise causing the body to store excess body fat
- Cold or sweaty hands/feet
- Hearing ringing, popping, buzzing sounds
- Grinding teeth
- Depression
- Chest pain/heart palpitations
- Acne

What are the effects of Stress?

- **Physiological:**
 - Susceptibility to infection
 - Elevated cholesterol
 - Increased risk of physical injuries
 - High blood pressure
 - Insomnia
 - Psychosomatic symptoms
 - Some forms of cancer
 - Adverse birth outcomes
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Weight gain
- **Psychological/Emotional:**
 - Depression, anxiety, panic attacks, self-medicating
 - Loss of self-esteem, and self-control

- **Lack of physical activity**
- **Substance abuse**
- **Smoking**
- **Work Performance**
 - Absenteeism
 - Sick days
 - Presenteeism – reduced engagement
 - Reduced morale
 - Co-worker conflict
 - Accidents on the job
 - An episode of serious depression can take an employee off the job for an estimated 40 days

Top 10 tools for building resiliency during stressful times:

1. **Physical Activity** – run, walk, biking, in-home rowing machine, online boxing class, pilates, online group exercise classes, online yoga class, dancing in your living room, weight training
2. **Meditation** – Guided Meditation, Mantra Meditation, Mindfulness Meditation, Yoga, Body Scan, Walking meditation
 - a. **Guided Meditation** – Calm App/Headspace
 - b. **Mantra Meditation** – Silently repeat a calming word, though or phrase to prevent distracting thoughts. See in/See out, Hear in/Hear out, I’m okay, I’m safe
 - c. **Mindfulness Meditation** – Increased awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment. You broaden your conscious awareness by focusing on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath, thoughts and emotions. Focus on your breathing.
 - d. **Yoga** – a series of postures and controlled breathing exercises to promote a more flexible body and calm mind.
 - e. **Body Scan** – Focus on your body sensations (pain, tension, warmth or relaxation). Combine the scan with breathing exercises and imagine breathing heat or relaxation into and out of different parts of your body
 - f. **Walk and Meditate** – Focus on legs and feet, repeat action words such as “Lifting, moving and placing” or “Left, right, left, right”.
 - g. **Read and Reflect** – literature, poems, sacred texts (The Power of Now Eckhart Tolle, Ancient Wisdom Modern World by the Dalai Lama)
3. **Counselling (CBT)** – Speak with a counsellor via Skype, FaceTime and over the phone to learn more specific techniques to manage your stress. Cognitive-behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be an effective tool. Document the Situation, Thoughts, Emotions, Evidence that contradicts your thoughts, and write a new Rational Statement
4. **Hobbies** - Singing ten minutes/day, dancing in your living room/online with friends, photography, painting, pottery, drawing, guitar, piano, hiking, running/jogging, knitting
5. **Social connection** – Online education course, get involved in a club or other organization, volunteer for a cause you believe in, join a bookclub, walk outside while talking to a friend on the phone, same for biking, plan an online social gathering (music party) with Zoom, online coffee with a friend, Brunch/Lunch/Dinner with a friend over FaceTime, Phone calls to check in, Online yoga class or group exercise class with a friend
6. **Gratitude** – Spending more time with my kids, more time to workout and take care of myself, more time to explore cooking, read novels, have the opportunity to connect with friends you haven’t connected with in a while, time to write the book you’ve always thought about writing,

explore a side hustle in this new environment, take a new course online that you've been interested in

7. **Journaling** – By spending just twenty minutes a day to jot down your thoughts, you can start to see your own thinking patterns and what is getting in your way of achieving your personal and professional goals. Dump out your thoughts and then try to respond by activating your rational brain. Ask yourself, 'What would the rational part of my brain say to this?' The negative thoughts can dominate, affecting our mood and emotional well-being. But if we can strengthen our rational, compassionate, and patient voice, we can work through our struggles more efficiently and effectively.
 - **BENEFITS OF JOURNALING:**
 - Accesses your left brain, freeing up the right brain to create, intuit and feel
 - Left brain focuses on analytical and rational thinking
 - Increases awareness of the subconscious, bringing information into consciousness (removing mental blocks)
 - Creates a louder, more rational voice that helps us to focus and organize our experiences, thoughts and feelings
 - Physical benefits – enhances your fight against asthma, RA, cancer and physical wounds
 - Speeds up emotional recovery and prepares us for the future
8. **Healthy Eating/Water** – Fruits, Vegetables, Whole grains, Lean proteins, eliminate junk food and highly processed foods. Keep it clean.
 - **Benefits to Healthy Eating:**
 - **Reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease by 28%**
 - Reduces the risk of cancer and other chronic illnesses
 - Helps to avoid excess weight gain
 - Improves mood and enhances self-esteem
 - Boosts energy – Foods high in sugar and saturated fats cause energy levels to drop. Healthy eating manages energy levels.
 - Decreases stress – certain foods have the ability to moderate our body's level of cortisol, the stress hormone. Foods packed with Vitamin-C, Omega-3 fatty acids and Magnesium help reduce cortisol levels
9. **Sleep** – 8 hours of sleep
10. **Spirituality** – Daily acts of Compassion, Respect, Patience, Forgiveness, Humility
 - a. **Compassion** – Hot bath, dropping off groceries for someone, downloading a new book, calling in to check on a friend
 - b. **Respect** – Listening to another without interrupting, applying for a new job, signing up for a new course/workshop, setting boundaries for yourself and others
 - c. **Patience** – Taking a 20 minute break, meditation, breaking down goals into smaller ones, trying a different communication strategy
 - d. **Forgiveness** – For missing a workout, for eating something unhealthy, for losing patience with a partner, for your partner losing patience with you
 - e. **Humility** – Getting up with the kids in the morning so your partner can rest, letting someone else choose the movie/show, donating your time to charity, apologizing

Managing remote employees in a pandemic:

1. **Regular, structured check-ins.** These could take in the form of one-on-one calls or a team call. The important feature is that the calls are regular and predictable, and that your team's concerns and questions can be heard.
2. **Provide several different communication technology options.** Email alone is insufficient. Remote workers benefit from having a "richer" technology, such as video conferencing, that gives participants many of the visual cue that they would have if they were face-to-face. When quick collaboration is required, mobile-enabled messaging system like Slack, Zoom or Microsoft Teams are great options.
3. **Provide opportunities for remote social interaction.** The easiest way to establish some basic social interaction is to leave some time at the beginning of team calls just for non-work items. Eg. Meet the family – kids, pets, etc.
4. **Offer encouragement and emotional support.** If a newly remote employee is clearly struggling but not communicating stress or anxiety, ask them how they're doing. Once you ask the question, be sure to listen carefully to the response, and briefly restate it back to the employee to ensure that you understood correctly. Listen. Openness. Validation. Empathy. Let the employees stress or concerns, rather than your own, be the focus of this conversation.
5. **Do something productive:** Activity is a great distraction, Do an activity that brings you joy and satisfaction, Eg. Clean something, organize items for a donation, learn a craft, read, walk the dog, weed or rake, make a list of people to check in with
6. **Keep on a schedule:** Makes us feel more in control, Put things on the schedule that are:
A) **Solitary** (reading, writing, crafting, baking, self-care, learning), B) **Social** – Calling friends and family members, C) **Necessary** – Cleaning, laundry, D) **Physical** – exercise, DO NOT stay on news or social media sites for too long, Take breaks to switch activities, Spend some time away from your phone, Eat at regular meal times
7. **Control what is yours to control:** Remind yourself of what you are doing to help contain the spread – "I am staying home, I am washing my hands and keeping an appropriate distance", "I am not putting myself or those around me in danger", "I am trusting the experts to do their jobs. EVERYONE wants this to be controlled and eradicated soon." "I do not have to spend time dwelling on what is not mine to control."

Additional Resources:

- The Power of Now – Eckhart Tolle
- Ancient Wisdom, Modern World – Dalai Lama
- Why we sleep – Matthew Walker
- www.mentalhealthcommission.ca
- www.guardingmindsatwork.ca
- Suicide Hotlines: 1-800-273-8255
- National Alliance on Mental Illness – 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
- Domestic Violence – 1-800-799-7233
- National Substance Abuse Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- www.smallwondersthatchangeeverything.com

About Jaime

Jaime Saibil M.A.

Jaime holds a Master's Degree in Counselling & Organizational Psychology, and has been working in Corporate Wellness, Organizational Design, Leadership Training and Mental Health for over a decade.

Jaime has worked as a consultant for Accenture's Talent & Organizational workgroup as an analyst to Fortune 500 companies.

She has also held consultant roles Personnel Decisions Intl and Results Continuum and was also a professor of Organizational Behaviour and Training and Development at George Brown College.

Jaime also provides individual counselling and executive coaching services outside of her consulting work.

Jaime has worked with many leading clients conducting Organizational Wellness Assessments and implementing employee focused changes resulting in lowered costs of absenteeism and higher productivity.

Jaime had also conducted workshops for clients in the areas of Stress Resiliency, Communications and Conflict Resolution, Physical Health (Weight Loss), Empathy and more.

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