It is difficult not to feel stressed in today’s current environment. This packet offers useful tips on how to identify how stress affects us as well as ways to reduce these symptoms.

We encourage you to call Health Resources EAP at 800-451-1834 for further assistance in reducing stress.
PART I

When you’re under stress, which of these symptoms do you typically experience? Check each one that fits you.

1. ___ My heart beats faster.
2. ___ I find it difficult to concentrate because of uncontrollable thoughts.
3. ___ I feel jittery in my body.
4. ___ Some thought runs through my mind and bothers me.
5. ___ I get frequent headaches.
6. ___ I keep going over decisions I have to make or have made.
7. ___ I perspire.
8. ___ I can’t keep anxiety-provoking thoughts out of my mind.
9. ___ I eat too much or lose my appetite.
10. ___ I feel bored.
11. ___ I feel tense in my stomach.
12. ___ I have difficulty falling asleep because I worry too much.
13. ___ I nervously pace.
14. ___ I feel discouraged and don’t think I can solve my problems.
15. ___ My blood pressure goes up.
16. ___ I keep thinking about the mistakes I have made.
17. ___ I want to smoke or take a drink.
18. ___ I feel irritable and angry over little things.

How did you do? Did you notice a pattern on how you answered the questions?

We experience both physical and mental stressors in our daily lives. For more information on how to reduce these stressors, see Part II.
**Part II**

If you checked odd-numbered questions in Part I, you tend to experience **physical** stressors; if you chose even-numbered responses, then you have **emotional** stressors. Some people experience both!

Here are some helpful activities that can help.

**Physical - Bodily or a Somatic Stress**
- Deep Muscle Relaxation
- Progressive Relaxation
- Meditation that focuses on breathing
- Hatha Yoga
- Massage
- Exercise

**Mental - Cognitive Stress**
- Meditation
- Hatha Yoga
- Deep Breathing with Visualization
- Active Generation of Cognitive Behavior (Playing Chess, etc.)
- Involvement of Entire Perceptual-Cognitive System (*Watching TV, Reading*)
- Activities (*Dancing, Walking, Sports*)
- Hypnosis

**Combination of Physical & Mental Stress**
- **Vigorous Physical Exercise** - Jogging, Running, Biking, Hiking, Swimming, Tennis, Martial Art Forms, Basketball, Volleyball
- Any activity that demands one’s concentrated physical and mental attention
- Hatha Yoga

WE ARE HERE TO HELP!
1.800.451.1834
Stressed at work? Stressed at home? Did you know that stress is now the #1 reason behind sickness from work? Here are some common sense ways to reduce stress levels in your life.

• Breathe consciously. Pay attention to your breathing. If you find your focus wandering return your attention to the ebb and flow of your breath. This calms the body.

• Imagine an energy bubble, like a balloon, around you. Visualize this bubble as a stress shield. Anything stressful will bounce off of it. The unconscious mind doesn't distinguish “reality” from imagination and releases tension in the mind/body.

• Exercise, exercise, exercise. Exercise breaks insulin resistance and helps end the vicious cycles of stress-eating, over-indulging in alcohol, cigarette smoking and other unhealthy habits.

• Reduce the items on your to-do list by one third. You will accomplish more with greater ease.

• Hot bath. Hot meal. Hot cup of tea. Moist heat is calming and expansive, a healer and stress reliever.

• Massage is the message. The power of touch relieves muscular tension, eases the joints, and refreshes the skin.

• Observe the pleasure principle. Psychologists know that praise, rewards and pleasure motivate people most. If you don’t get lots of validation for what you do, then build in small rewards for yourself at intervals between getting tasks done.

• Back to nature. The calming sounds of the ocean washing onto shore or the wind rushing through the trees are like the first lullabies our mothers sang us. Fresh air and beautiful scenery occur in environments incompatible with stress. They please and soothe the senses.

Are you creating pleasure and purpose in your life? Make time to do the things you value and enjoy, and you will have created the best stress buster of them all!
“All people respond to stress in the same way.”
There are as many ways to handle stress as there are people. It really depends on how you view stress in general. Some people are energized by stress, others become exhausted and feel burned-out. Depending on your view of stress, you may respond by coping in any number of productive or unproductive ways.

“It is easy to identify the causes of excessive stress.”
Many causes of excessive stress are considered to be “good things” and therefore are not initially seen as stressful. Positive life events such as marriage, buying a new home or car, or even getting a promotion, can all cause excessive stress. It’s important to remember the variety of life events, both good and bad that create stress.

“I always know when I begin to suffer from excessive stress.”
People often go about their lives not paying attention to physical and emotional signs of stress. Many times people go weeks, months or even years before they begin to suspect that their reactions to life events are not productive or healthy. It often takes a crisis or tragedy to bring this awareness about.

“Doing a few minutes of relaxation each day will not ease my stress!”
If done regularly, it’s surprising how taking a brisk walk, using breathing exercises, meditation, practicing yoga or even reading a good book can dramatically reduce your stress level.

“Stress-related symptoms and psychosomatic disease are all in my head; therefore they really can’t hurt me.”
Medical research has proven that excessive stress can contribute to the acceleration of ailments such as headaches, depression, insomnia, ulcers and heart disease. When one feels “symptoms”, it is the body’s way of telling us that perhaps too much is going on and that we need to pay attention to our current life situations.

“I’m not responsible for the stress in my life — stress is unavoidable these days — we’re all victims.”
It’s natural to feel helpless at times when stressful events happen. Stress is unavoidable. However, we are the only ones who can reduce the amount of stress in our own lives. Individually, we know what’s best for ourselves and what can relieve feelings of being overwhelmed. It just takes practice.
What common human activity relaxes tense muscles; reduces blood pressure and heart rate; exercises muscles in the face, diaphragm and abdomen; boosts the immune system; and causes the body to release pain-fighting hormones? The answer is LAUGHTER! Here are some tips for getting your humor muscles in shape.

- Find things that make you laugh and do them. See a funny movie, read a funny book, memorize a joke and tell it to friends.
- The next time you’re in a distressing situation, mentally put yourself in the shoes of your favorite comedian. What would David Letterman have to say about it? Jerry Seinfeld? Humor depends on being able to see the humor where others only see aggravation. It’s the difference between tragedy and comedy.
- Allow a feeling of playfulness to creep into your life. Let your mind be open to silly and uncensored thoughts.
- Amuse yourself in humorous exaggeration. Stuck in traffic? Think of cobwebs forming between your car and the next or snails overtaking you on the shoulder of the road.
- Share cartoons, jokes and other funny material at work. Put cartoons up on the bulletin board. By helping others reduce stress you make your own job easier. And people will just be more relaxed around you if they know you have a sense of humor.
- Get into the habit of laughing at life’s contradictions. You can bet your Groucho Marx glasses you’ll never run out of material.
- People will feel safe and comfortable around you if they know you can laugh - but not if you laugh at them. Humor that is cruel or sarcastic breeds a negative attitude in both the humorist and the audience. Stay on the light side. Life is funny enough without resorting to vicious humor.

Finally, practice laughing at yourself. You just can’t help becoming more accepting of your own shortcomings, and that’s a sure-fire stress-buster.
Recent studies show that one in four employees have an anxiety-related illness due to job stress. American workers consume 15 tons of aspirin a day! If you suffer from Terminal Professionalism, consider using laughter instead of pain medication to cope with stress.

Did You Know…

- The average adult laughs only 15 times a day while the average child laughs about 150 times a day.
- Employers consider a sense of humor a positive quality in employees.
- Humor has been shown to enhance group problem solving.
- 100 laughs is equal to ten minutes of aerobic exercise.
- Laughter can reduce stress hormones.
- Muscle tension is significantly lowered through laughter and a real “belly” laugh can relax muscles the same way as a vigorous massage.
- People who know how to laugh are positive thinkers.

It’s Been Proven That Laughter At Work:

- Improves productivity
- Reduces tensions and boredom
- Does not distract employees from their duties
- Can establish rapport
- Can neutralize emotionally charged interpersonal situations
- Is cost effective
- Reduces absenteeism
- Improves morale
- Increases creativity

It’s important to take your work seriously, but also take time during the day to step back and observe or participate in humorous situations.

Important Notice: Information in this flyer is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns contact Health Resources Employee Assistance Program. Health Resources EAP is not responsible for the content of the materials provided on the Internet.

Adapted from www.humormatters.com