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How to Beat Serious Stress

Every day we face stressful events. Most of these events are minor. But other events are clearly major sources of stress. These include things such as a marriage or divorce, or trouble at home or work.

You may need help from others, such as a professional counselor, to judge how stressful a situation really is. After that, you can put in order what you need to get done. You also need to look at the resources available to help you understand and work through the problem.

When you're faced with a highly stressful event in your life, these methods may help you cope:

- **Don't make unneeded changes in your life.** Instead, save what energy you have for dealing with the major stressor at hand. If possible, try to make your work and home environments stable while working out the main problem.
- **Quiet your mind.** Use deep breathing and visualization methods to calm your mind and slow your breathing. When you're stressed, your mind can make things seem worse. It does this by creating endless versions of coming disaster. This affects your body, too. The body can't tell the difference between what's real and what's not. So, it reacts with a greater physical response.
- **Stay in the present.** You can calm both your mind and your body by keeping your mind in the present. The present is hardly ever as stressful as an imagined future or a past full of regrets. To stay in the present, center your attention on your breathing, a sound or visual pattern, a repetitive movement, or meditation.
- **Bravely and aggressively face the stressor.** Don't just ignore whatever is causing you stress. Instead, carefully think about the seriousness of the problem. But don't blow it out of proportion. Ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that is realistically likely to happen?" Then remind yourself of all the good things that will still be a part of your life even if the worst happens. Talk with others to

confirm your view of the stressor. Make a special effort to speak to family, friends, or co-workers who have had similar experiences.

- **Review your coping responses.** Confidence is helpful in fighting stress. And it builds on memories of past successes. Think about successes you've had with other stressful life events. Recall some of the things you did to cope. Think about writing this down.
- **Take action.** Commit to a reasonable way to deal with what is causing you stress. Action is powerful in helping you to reduce stress. Studies show that your body lowers the amount of a powerful stress hormone (epinephrine) when you shift into action. Don't stop taking action because you're afraid you'll make the wrong decision. There are many ways to successfully handle a stressful situation.
- **Take time out to relax.** At least once or twice a day, take time to calm down by relaxing. Try listening to soothing music, taking a walk, gardening, reading, or exercising. You could also choose to do more formal relaxation such as deep breathing or meditation.
- **Be mindful of your time.** Consider making a day-to-day prioritized list of what you need to do. This can help decrease a sense of being overwhelmed.
- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep can cause additional physical and emotional problems, such as drowsiness, memory problems, and trouble concentrating.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs.** Far from helping you cope; these can actually make symptoms worse.