



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Simple Ways to Reduce Your Daily Stress Level

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Commentary

We talk about stress a lot. So, what exactly is it? It can come to us externally through our senses. It can also originate internally through our thoughts and memories as we dwell on certain experiences or images. Either one of these influences can result in a stress reaction. That's when stress causes a physical or psychological response.

Our reaction to stress-producing thoughts can be measured by increased heart rate, faster breathing, and higher blood pressure. It is important to understand that your body and your mind work in tandem so one impacts the other. While stress reactions are often normal responses to what life brings to us, we often acquire more than our daily share and we can easily become overwhelmed in our fast-paced, demanding world.

How do we reduce the stress load? Many people are surprised when they realize that they may be unintentionally piling stressors on themselves! How? Our behaviors play a role. Using stimulants, our physical fitness level, where we go, who we talk to, and what we choose to dwell on during the day can all contribute to our stress load. Let's look at stimulant use and where we focus our attention.

The overuse of stimulants in our diets can mimic a bodily stress reaction and fool your mind into believing action is required on your part to do something. Think of a boxer responding to a start bell only to find there is no opponent there. It can increase blood pressure and release stress hormones. By minimizing use of stimulants like caffeine, cigarette smoke, and even spicy foods, some people can reduce their stress loads. Stimulants create an arousal state in your body that your mind can interpret as stress. Consider moderation or abstinence if these are troublesome for you.

Now consider what people take into their eyes, ears, and thoughts during the day. We may very well be elevating our stress levels artificially. Violent or disturbing movies and television shows, certain music, disturbing reading materials, and graphic video games may provoke a reaction. They may be entertaining but, if these media forms are overstimulating you, they too can mimic real event stress reactions in your body. Another consequence is their possible impact on sleep. Reducing these forms of stimulation in the evening should be considered if you are having sleep difficulties.

The best thing you can do is to take an inventory of your behaviors during the day and see if any of these activities are impacting you. If they are, modify or eliminate them and your stress level may noticeably reduce. Why allow more stress-producing activities into your day? Take control now!