The basics of stress management

Posted by Nancy Elder, University of Cincinnati  July 09, 2008 03:48AM
Categories: Impact, Netwellness

Some people seem to naturally handle stressful situations without letting it "get to them."

In reality, it is a combination of both natural and learned skills that help us deal with stressful times. While we can't change the temperament we were born with, or medical problems we may have, we can all learn better ways to handle stress.

When people feel overwhelmed, they may find it difficult to sleep, they may lose their appetite (or want to eat everything in sight), find it hard to concentrate and even seem to forget things more often.

When these symptoms last for many weeks, and especially if they are associated with sadness, tearfulness and a loss of interest in things, then a person might have depression, and should see a mental health counselor or primary care physician for an evaluation.

Healthy ways of dealing with stress can decrease uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms. Of course, actively working to decrease external stressors is helpful, but sometimes you have no control over a situation. Remembering and following some of the following steps may help you improve your ability to survive stressful times more successfully:

- Allow plenty of time for sleep, and practice good sleep hygiene. That means sleeping in a comfortable place, avoiding caffeine or alcohol before bed and getting up at a regular time each morning (regardless of how well you slept the night before).
- Get regular exercise almost every day for at least 30 minutes. It could be a walk around the block or a workout at the gym, but get up and move. But don't exercise one to two hours before bed.
- Eat healthy. Remember lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Try to avoid lots of fatty or sugary foods.
- Drink plenty of fluids, preferably water.
- Be with people. The strongest factor that seems to naturally handle stressful situations without letting it "get to them." Being with these people, talking to them, spending time with them, doing for others and letting others help you is the most important thing you can do to get through stressful times.

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Outlook has everything to do with stress management as does health. Remain positive, negativity serves no purpose. Remember that all things are outside of yourself and are just things or situations that do not define you - not that important.