

## STRESS

### WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a normal part of life; everyone experiences stress. Not all stress is bad; healthy doses of stress make us feel challenged and energized.

It is not the actual stressful event that matters, but how we cope with that event. If feelings of stress are not dealt with and go on for a long time, your mental and physical health can be affected.

### HOW CAN STRESS AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?

- Sleep problems
- Some skin problems
- Stomach upset or ulcers
- Change in appetite or weight
- Migraines
- Frequent colds and infections
- Tiredness, lack of energy
- Lack of interest in sex
- Higher risk of chronic disease, such as heart disease
- Higher risk of depression and anxiety

### TEST YOURSELF TO SEE HOW YOU ARE RESPONDING TO STRESSFUL EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE

- Using more alcohol, cigarettes or drugs
- Eating too much or too little when you are stressed
- Feeling angry or irritated with others
- Worrying frequently
- Blaming yourself
- Lacking motivation to do anything
- Feeling overwhelmed and out of control
- Not enjoying life, family friends or activities like you used to

### WHAT CAN I DO?

It is not realistic to think that we can make all stress go away. We can't always control the situation but we can develop some ways to help us cope better with stressful events.

- **Learn More about Stress**  
The most important first step in self managing stress is knowledge. Read about stress at the library, or on the internet.
- **Assess Your situation**  
Look at the situations that cause stress in your life. Learn more about your own style of managing stress by making lists of things that you are doing well, and lists of things that you would like to change. Commit to trying things that you know would be helpful.

- **Eat a healthy diet:** Your body needs good food to help it feel better. Eat small meals and drink lots of water. Follow Canada's Food Guide.
- **Limit amounts of caffeine and sugar:** Cut down total daily amount of tea, coffee, cola, chocolate and sweets. These substances add additional stress to the body and brain.
- **Be more active**  
Even 15 minutes of regular exercise each day will help you feel more relaxed and energetic. Find an activity that you like to do alone or with some friends. Make it a reward not a chore.
- **Learn some relaxation techniques:** Breathe slowly, use muscle relaxation techniques, acupuncture or meditation.
- **Establish a sleep routine:** Set a regular time to go to bed and get up in the morning. Try to get 7-8 hours of sleep a night.
- **Get it out:** Talk to a trusted friend or write in a journal about how you are feeling.
- **Learn New Skills**  
You may need to learn some ways to manage things that you find stressful (time management, organizational skills, budgeting etc). Sign up for a course that interests you or take up a hobby.

### **WHERE CAN I GET HELP?**

You will probably find that you will be able to pinpoint the changes that you should be making. If not, and if your issues are causing significant problems for you and your family, call your family doctor or mental health professional to learn more. A professional can see you individually or you could join a group educational session.

Call the Mental Health Program for an appointment or information on free acupuncture or group programs.

**Mental Health Program, South Shore Health**  
**Dawson Centre, Level 2**  
**197 Dufferin Street**  
**Bridgewater, Nova Scotia**  
**B4V 2G9**

**Call 527-5228 Monday to Friday (except holidays) 8:30-4:30**

[www.mentalhealthsouthshore.ca](http://www.mentalhealthsouthshore.ca)

