

Managing Stress In Your Life

How do you manage the stress in your life? Stress is a normal part of our lives and continuously changes. We experience periods of high and low stress, beneficial stress that signals positive changes in life, and harmful stress that is disabling. Whatever kind of stress you experience, it is important to be aware of it and include positive coping skills into your regular routine. Letting stress go unchecked or using poor coping skills can lead to negative impacts on your body in the form of headaches, high blood pressure, digestive issues, or sleep problems. Harmful thoughts and feelings like depression, mood swings, or anxiety can also occur. These can then result in bigger problems like excessive drinking or drug use and relationship difficulties.

There are both risk factors and protective factors that contribute to our level of stress and/or burnout. Risk factors are those items that increase the possibility for stress-related complications. These include things like the lack of a supportive social network or an overly demanding job. On the other hand, protective factors help people avoid problems with stress.

These include having a good work-home life balance, healthy eating habits, and a good sleeping routine. Just like you do preventative maintenance on your car, you can also

prevent problems with stress by working on how you deal with your risk factors and protective factors.

Small changes in daily life can make a big difference. Ask yourself:

- Do you take enough time to relax?
- Do you talk openly with your friends, especially when you are worried about something?
- Are you eating and exercising at healthy, moderate levels? These are areas that can get neglected when people are under a lot of stress.

It is important to increase the variety of your coping skills and to use your protective skills on a regular basis. Each person handles stress in their own way. When you focus on how you already manage your own stress, you can probably find a lot of healthy strategies that help you. These healthy strategies can help you avoid harmful strategies like substance abuse. Here are some common examples of protective factors and healthy strategies for managing stress:

- Become more aware of stressors and your reactions to them
- Find a way to exercise that works for you



- Develop relationships and friendships with supportive and healthy people
- Don't overextend yourself; delegate when possible and set realistic, meaningful goals

This article is one of a series by the Strathcona County Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Committee (specifically Brandi Smith and Shawn Reynolds, Ph.D., R.Psych., part of the clinical team at Bosco Homes) addressing information about drug and alcohol issues.

Resources

For a complete listing of resources available, pick up the Drug/Alcohol Resource

directory at the Strathcona County Health Centre located at 2 Brower Drive or at Strathcona County Family and Community Services located at 2755 Broadmoor Boulevard (2nd Floor) in Sherwood Park.

Questions about drug or alcohol issues?

Call Strathcona County Family and Community Services at 780-464-4044.