

## Counseling Corner

### Stress Doesn't Have to Dominate Your Life

from the American Counseling Association

Stress has always been a part of life. In ancient times it might have been caused by a growling bear, while today it's more likely to be a growling, demanding boss. Whatever the cause, stress is something we all experience, but it doesn't have to control our lives.

The answer is to learn what things cause us stress, how we respond to stress, and what we can do to better handle that stress.

Some stress, of course, is healthy. It motivates us, gets us excited and gets us moving toward positive goals. But when stress causes negative reactions and leaves us feeling scared or physically and emotionally drained, it's time to take action.

Start by analyzing what stress does to you. Does it leave you feeling tense, cause a painful headache, or make you jumpy and snappy with others? Perhaps stress makes you quiet and listless?

Either way, or anything in between, it's not a good feeling. You can deal with that by taking physical action to take you away from the stress causing issue. If stress gives you energy, try something as simple as taking a walk or bike ride. If stress leaves you tired, try something calming, such as meditating for a few minutes or having a light snack.

Such responses sound simple, but the point is to know yourself and to take action. As you begin to discover how you react to stress, you can also begin to analyze what stresses you.

Are you afraid of looking incompetent at work, or of letting down your family or friends? Are you feeling that you've lost control of your environment (traffic jam stress, for example)? As you begin to identify what causes you stress, it's also time to examine your priorities. What things are really important to you? Are there fears you have that lie beneath the situations that cause the most stress?

As you begin to understand what causes you stress, you can take positive steps to deal with those issues. Maybe it's an anxiety-provoking colleague you want to avoid. Maybe it's learning to say "no" to situations that eat up your time but provide little personal benefit.

You can't avoid all stress but it shouldn't be negatively affecting your life. A professional counselor can help you identify what causes your stress, and can help you develop strategies to avoid or better handle it.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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