

Survival tip: make your health a priority.

It isn't stress that causes problems, but rather the way we cope with it.

Checklist

- Exercise.
- Leave your teaching at school.
- Be good to yourself.
- Always have something to look forward to.
- Don't schedule all your leisure hours.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Observe good eating habits.
- Pursue a project or hobby.
- Find a friend who can be a "trusted" listener.
- Don't procrastinate.
- Don't feel you have to do everything.
- Rid yourself of worry.
- Learn to plan.
- Remember to play.
- Recognize and accept limits.
- Learn to tolerate and forgive.
- Be a positive person.
- Avoid unnecessary competition.

Taking care of yourself

Within the first few weeks of school, there will be many new demands made of you: new texts, techniques, schedules, students and a new way of life. It's an exciting as well as a stressful time.

In the midst of all this excitement, you may notice some physical and emotional reactions to the new demands. Understanding what is happening will help you cope with these responses.

The only people without stress are in the cemetery! It isn't stress that causes problems, but rather the inappropriate choices we make in coping with the demands on us.

People who don't deal positively with stressful situations become ill. This occurs because the body's immunological system is worn down in the fight against the stressors. Migraines, ulcers, backaches, constipation and heart attacks are only a few of the physical consequences of inappropriate coping techniques.

Here are some useful techniques and some "preventive medicine" to protect you against debilitating stress symptoms.

Exercise! After a day of teaching, you owe it to your body to shake off the chalk dust. It will revive you. Exercise also helps to rid the body of chemicals that are discharged as a result of stress. The best cardiovascular activities include walking, swimming, bicycling and jogging. (Always clear your exercise plan with your physician.)

Leave your teaching at school. If you must take home schoolwork, get it done early in the evening. Better yet, do it at school and leave it there.

Be good to yourself. What could do more for your self-esteem than to take yourself out to dinner or buy yourself a treat?

Don't schedule all of your leisure hours. You live by a schedule all day long. Leave yourself some "open space."

Get plenty of sleep. Go to bed early if you are tired. Don't lie awake worrying about how you should have handled Johnny in class.

Observe good eating habits. Watch your vitamin and mineral supplements. Eat wholesome foods so that your body takes in a sufficient amount of calcium, potassium, iron, vitamin B, vitamin C and protein. When in stress, the system calls on these nutrients for energy. Without them, the physiological system breaks down and you get tired or sick.

Pursue a project or hobby. Pursue a project or hobby that involves your concentration so much that you forget about school. You'll find this much more relaxing than doing nothing but thinking about school.

Find a friend who can be a "trusted" listener. Talking a problem out won't make it go away, but it can relieve tension. Do your talking in a private place. Don't vent your frustrations in a public place where you can be overheard and misunderstood.

Don't procrastinate. Having something "hanging over you" can cause more tension than the project is worth.

Don't feel you have to do everything. You can't and you won't. So why worry about it?

Rid yourself of worry. A study has shown that 40 percent of the items people worry about never happen; 35 percent can be changed; 15 percent turn out better than expected; 8 percent involve needless concern; and only 2 percent really deserve attention.

Learn to plan. Disorganization breeds stress. Having too many projects going at the same time leads to confusion, forgetfulness, and a terrible sense of uncompleted tasks hanging over one's head. Plan ahead. Develop your own personal style of getting things done in a calm, orderly way. Keep a "things to do" list. Review it daily and do at

least one or two things. Whenever possible, take on projects one at a time and work on them until completed.

Remember to play. You need regularly to escape from the pressures of life and have fun. Find pastimes or hobbies that are absorbing and enjoyable regardless of your level of ability.

Recognize and accept limits. Most of us set unreasonable and unattainable goals for ourselves. But we can never be perfect (or even come close), so we often have a sense of failure or inadequacy no matter how well we perform. Reevaluate your goals with ruthless realism. Are they achievable? Or do they reflect an effort to reach perfection, certainty, or ultimate security in a very imperfect world? Is that what life is really all about?

Learn to tolerate and forgive. Intolerance and judging of others leads to frustration and anger. Try to really understand the other person's concerns and fears. Try to see the pressures on them. This will make you feel more accepting of them even if you do not agree with their behavior or opinions.

Be a positive person. Avoid criticizing others. Focus on the good qualities of those around you. Excessive criticism of others almost always reflects dissatisfaction with oneself.

Avoid unnecessary competition. Many competitive situations cannot be avoided. But too much concern with winning in too many areas of life creates tension and hostility. It is generally desirable to minimize competitiveness and concern with winning.



Available from the NEA Professional Library:

Pitfalls and Potholes: A Checklist for Avoiding Common Mistakes of Beginning Teachers by Murray and Murray; 56 pp., 1997, stock #2151700; non-members \$5.95, NEA members \$4.50

Order by calling 1-800-229-4200 or visiting www.nea.org/books.

Survival tip: eat healthy.

When the government decided to provide school lunches to meet one-third of our children's nutritional needs on a regular basis, the menu was developed for children who are constantly active and growing. Unfortunately, most adults who eat these meals are neither very active nor growing, so they may find the meals exceed their recommended levels of fat and calories, based on their age and level of activity.

Many of us simply do not participate in enough aerobic exercise or muscle-strengthening programs to balance out the impact of meals like school lunches. As we age, the importance of exercise becomes even more significant and should not be ignored in our ongoing endeavor to improve our quality of life. For now, however, let's focus on ways to take control of the school lunch dilemma.

The whole basis to enjoyable, healthy meals is a combination of variety, balance, quantity and quality which, when put into simple English, means some protein (1-2 oz.), some starch (1-2 servings), some dairy (1 serving), a piece of fruit and/or vegetables, and something to satisfy that "sweet tooth" occasionally. Choosing some low-fat items is recommended but what matters more is that the serving sizes you choose are reasonable.

Fortunately, many school cafeterias now offer salad bars and other "light" meals. If that is not an option, with just a little effort and planning, you can pack a lunch from home that is attractive, varied, nutritious, and inexpensive.

Leftovers are wonderful lunches; just put them in a container as you're clearing the dinner table. Add a piece of fruit and some raw vegetables the next morning, and you're ready to go. Buy some juice or low-fat milk at school, and you've met the basic

requirements for a healthy meal with ease.

Frozen dinners are an excellent choice if chosen with care (i.e., ensuring that the fat calories are 30% or less of the overall calories). Once again, I suggest supplementing with a piece of fruit and some milk/juice or a low-fat dairy dessert.

Stock up on snack foods such as pretzels, nuts, dried fruit, and popcorn. Store them in little plastic bags so they're easy to grab between classes, as part of lunch, or on the way to exercise or home.

Another idea is to make your refrigerator into a vending machine from which you can select a variety of items which promise a great meal: a bread roll (vary the types of bread), a yogurt, a piece of fruit, a chunk of cheese, a piece of cold chicken/fish/beef/hard-boiled egg, and some plain cookies.

I always suggest including some protein and a little fat in your lunch because they are the nutrients that keep you alert through the afternoon classes and also stave off hunger. A meal that consists mainly of carbohydrates will make you sleepy and lethargic and should be saved for supper.

What makes a meal satisfying matters the most. Meeting nutritional needs is worthless if you don't enjoy the food. Think about taking a school lunch that is easy to prepare at school (e.g., needs only microwaving), is easy to eat, and offers a choice of items that are varied, seasonal, and well balanced. It will require planning, but once you get into the habit, the rest is easy and the choices are endless! Bon appetit!

Sharon Yankelson, RD, LD, is a nutrition consultant in Austin.