

## Mental Health

### Stress Awareness is an Important Part of Healthcare



By Kris Kerlin,  
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Management

Stress is an important factor to consider when assessing the overall health of a person. In an American Medical Association report, it states that an alarming “80- 85% of all illnesses have a stress-related component.” High levels of negative stress can compromise the physical and mental wellness of the ill individual, their caregivers and even those who live with them. It



is important that all people, especially those with chronic illnesses as well as their caregivers, generally understand the effects that prolonged stress can have on their minds and bodies. It is also critical that they learn practical techniques to manage or minimize the levels of stress that they may endure.

Not all stress has negative consequences. Eustress can actually enhance performance and assist a person in meeting challenges. However, excessive or prolonged negative stress can also create undesirable or adverse health effects. Stress hormones impact the development and severity of many different diseases and bodily systems. In some instances, stress causes existing conditions to worsen, while in other cases, stress seems to be a major factor in susceptibility to other illnesses. For this reason, it is important to assess the level of stress being experienced by a person. If stress levels are high, appropriate stress management skills can be used to lower stress levels, increase

wellness and coping and prevent negative outcomes.

Stress is a fact of life and stress management skills are necessary for people of all ages. How we manage the stress we experience will create our quality of life. Stress is a psychos-physiological response to living. It impacts our body, mind and spirit. No matter what age we are, our bodies respond to stress with physiological changes including muscle tension, increased heart rate and rapid breathing. Hormones (including adrenaline and cortisol) are released to prepare our body to meet a threat or challenge. The stress response creates tension in our bodies.

Increased tension in our bodies can increase pain, aggravate illnesses and contribute to other illnesses ranging from colds to heart disease and strokes.

Our mind determines what we experience as a threat or challenge. What is threatening or challenging to one person may not be so to another. Our experiences, our temperaments, our coping style all impact what we experience as stress. Stress can impact your mind by affecting memory, concentration and problem-solving skills. It is hard to think straight if you are experiencing a lot of stress. Stress can impact your emotions. It can manifest as anger or anxiety or self doubt. If stress levels are not managed well it can lead to depression and other mental health issues.

During times of stress we may question the meaning and purpose of our lives. It can be an important time to take stock of your values, your priorities and your

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Amy Fote in *The Concert*.  
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There are also frequent challenges that maternal ICU nurses face in dealing with so many complex, high-risk cases. One of the most difficult is when the outcome is less than favorable and their ability to comfort and support the mother and family is a critical part of their role as caregiver.

The maternal ICU nurses at the Pavilion for Women lead rounds for their patients and they serve as the code team if a patient becomes compromised anywhere in the hospital. This team has also been active in writing policies

for the care of the critically ill. "I'm proud to have such a highly qualified team of nurses that work so tirelessly to care for their patients," said Baird.

Thanks to this team of 12 nurses in the maternal ICU at the Pavilion for Women, more than 100 patients with life-threatening pregnancy- and gynecological-related medical conditions have received expert, compassionate care. ▼

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lifestyle habits. Stress can be the catalyst to begin a deeper spiritual inquiry in our lives.

People living with an illness experience stressors related to their illness. Changes in physical abilities, pain, financial pressures, changes to family dynamics, changes in social interaction, and painful emotions are some of the typical stressors for people living with an illness. The good news is that our circumstances do not have to dictate our quality of life. Stress management skills can help you manage your response to circumstances so that you can experience peace on the inside regardless and sometimes, despite, what is happening on the outside of your life.

### Stress Management Skills for Any Age

1. Breathe deeply and slowly: Deep breathing from our diaphragm is a signal to the body to slow down and helps to invoke the relaxation response. Bringing conscious attention to your breathing and noticing whether you are breathing fast or slow, shallow or deep and from your chest or your diaphragm is the beginning of stress management.
2. Practice an attitude of gratitude: When we focus on what we have to be grateful for it helps people shift perspective on the things that are causing stress, and helps us connect with meaning that extends beyond our current circumstances.
3. Focus on what you can change: Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors are connected and when we change the way we think about something, our feelings about it and our behaviors often change too.
4. Feel your emotions: Feelings of loss, sadness, anger, anxiety can feel unwelcomed. Stored feelings can cause a chronic stress reaction. Find a way to feel your feelings – journal, talk to someone you trust, cry, create art, or do something physical.
5. Move your body: Movement flushes stress related hormones out of our body and promotes healthy physiological reactions. Ten minutes a day of physical activity or exercise may lower blood pressure, body mass index and improve overall health. The sooner that you get up and move after you feel stress, the better. It is like cleaning up a spill as soon as it hits the carpet.
6. Get spiritual: Things in life happen that are outside our control. A substantial amount of research supports the health benefits of spirituality. Finding meaning and purpose beyond ourselves can alleviate stress.
7. Laugh and have fun: Laughter helps shift perspective about a

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situation, to relieve stress, find delight, experience joy and release tension. The first documented case of humor positively affecting disease was in 1964 when Norman

Cousins, published "Anatomy of an Illness."

Kerlin is founder of the Center for Stress Management and a volunteer

clinician with the Pro Bono Counseling Program at Mental Health America of Greater Houston (MHA). The MHA Pro Bono Counseling Program is a free community service that offers counseling

at no cost to individuals and families who are unemployed, uninsured or unable to afford these services. [www.mhahouston.org](http://www.mhahouston.org). ▼

## Legal Health

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that could be taken out of context or be incomplete.

The control group should work to review and then resolve any issues that arise from the response project and a final written remediation and response plan should be created under the advice and input of counsel.

Each member of the control group

should create a confidential file in their computer and in their email system to store materials and communications for the project. The files must be marked confidential and privileged. Project members should not co-mingle any non-essential communications in the folder.

If an email correspondence is necessary, it should also be marked as privileged and confidential when sent, when stored

or when destroyed in the regular course of business.

Documents should be stored in their confidential file and then the business operations should follow a process to close the project by collecting and storing the protected material appropriately in accordance with document management policy.

These ten steps will walk the organization through the who, what, where, when, and how, in a quick and organized way. They will assist the organization and management to efficiently handle responses and to mitigate some of the stresses that they create. Should you have questions on this process or a potential response or inquiry, please contact Brian Flood at Brown McCarroll LLP. ▼

## Smoking

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lowest level compared with 2.46 in the highest bilirubin quartile.

Next step: Establish a risk prediction model in heavy smokers

Bilirubin makes sense as a protective agent because of its anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-proliferative effects. "It's plausible that bilirubin protects against lung cancer by scavenging free radicals and carcinogens

associated with smoking," said study presenter Fanmao Zhang, a doctoral candidate in epidemiology.

Indeed, a Belgian study showed that bilirubin in the high normal range

lowered cancer mortality in men. A study in the United Kingdom showed higher bilirubin levels in the normal range were associated with lower risks of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,

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