

Tip sheet: Mindfulness for Managing Stress

Stress is an unavoidable part of life. From time to time, everyone experiences increased levels of stress. However, if left unaddressed, stress can continue to build and affect your health and ability to cope with life. This process can occur with chronic stress that builds gradually over time, or with acute stress, that suddenly overwhelms your ability to cope.

Studies show that mindfulness can be an effective way to manage stress. Exercises that help people achieve a state of mindfulness reduce ruminations over things that cause stress, keep people from dwelling on negative thoughts and decrease anxiety over the future. By providing a temporary break from stressful thoughts, mindfulness allows you to pause and gain a wider perspective before reacting automatically.

Mindfulness is most commonly achieved through meditation, and the regular practice of mindfulness meditation has benefits for your physical health, as well as your emotional health.

Basic meditation for stress management:

1. Get into a comfortable position that allows you to completely relax, while still staying awake.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Clear your mind. This takes practice. When a thought enters your mind, simply notice it and then let it go. Don't judge it. Then turn your attention back to the present moment.
4. Continue to notice and then let go of any thoughts that enter your mind. As you continue to practice, the quiet spaces between thoughts will become longer and more frequent.

Tips:

- Be patient and don't strive for perfection. Meditation is called "practice" for a reason.
- Start with short sessions (5 minutes) and work your way up to longer sessions.

For those who feel they do not have enough time or patience to dedicate to meditation, there are many other ways to ease into the practice of mindfulness and begin to experience some of its benefits.

Gardening, listening to music, driving and even housecleaning can become a practice in mindfulness if you take the right approach: focusing on the present, and quieting the inner voice that offers a running commentary on what you're doing, what you've done and what you will (or should) be doing.

Find more information at www.1in5.info