



Stress Control
Through Lifestyle Management

Participant Manual

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Session 1: Course Overview

Course Overview

Today's workforce is experiencing job burnout and stress in epidemic proportions. Workers at all levels feel stressed out, insecure, and misunderstood. Many people feel the demands of the workplace, combined with the demands of home, have become too much to handle. This workshop explores the causes of such stress, and suggests general and specific stress management strategies that people can use every day.

Learning Objectives

Specific learning objectives for today include:

- Understand that stress is a positive, unavoidable part of everybody's life
- Recognize the symptoms that tell you when you have chronic stress overload
- Identify those situations in your life that cause you the greatest stress
- Identify those actions which add to your stress
- Change the situations and actions that can be changed
- Deal better with situations and actions that can't be changed
- Create an action plan for work, home, and play to help reduce and manage stress

Personal Objectives

Session 2: Defining Stress & How it Affects Me

Where Are You Now?

A party where you wouldn't know many people.

A new job in a new company.

A move to another part of the country.

A 500 mile drive that takes you alone through some rather isolated country.

A trip to downtown Boston with friends, you doing the driving.

A flight to Vancouver to attend a conference.

A dinner party for your spouse's or partner's family.

An afternoon of Christmas shopping in a large mall.

You are stuck in a real traffic tie-up and in 10 minutes you will be late for a really important meeting. You don't have a cell phone and there is no phone booth in sight. How will you deal with your stress?

You're at work and it's almost 4:30. You have two top-priority deadlines to meet today, and it is your turn to pick up your child from the babysitter no later than 6:00pm. You find yourself going from one project to another and getting very little accomplished. Everyone else has their own time pressures so you can't delegate any part of your work to anyone else. Your boss is breathing down your neck, and you feel your neck beginning to tighten, signaling the onset of another tension headache. How will you cope?

Defining and Identifying Stress

Can we define what we mean by stress? Stress is our mental, physical, and behavioral response to anxiety-producing events. Too much stress can result in serious physical, psychological, interpersonal, or performance problems.

What are some of the causes of stress in your life?

The amount of stress that we experience depends on how much stress we have, how long we have it, and how we are able to manage it.

- According to Peter Hansen, best-selling author of several books about stress, work and the workplace causes most of our stress.
- According to the Holmes-Rahe stress scale, the greatest single stressors come from our personal lives.

Holmes-Rahe Stress Rating

Life Event (During Past 24 Months)	Life Change Units
Begin or end school	26
Business readjustment	39
Change in church activities	19
Change in eating habits	15
Change in financial state	38
Change in health of family member	44
Change in living conditions	25
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change in recreation	19
Change in residence	20
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Change in schools	20
Change in sleeping habits	17
Change in social activities	19
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change to a different line of work	36
Christmas	12
Death of a close friend	37
Death of close family member	63
Death of spouse	100
Divorce	73

Fired at work	47
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Gain of a new family member	39
Incarceration	63
Marital reconciliation	45
Marital separation	65
Marriage	50
Minor violation of the law	11
Mortgage or loan more than \$50,000	18
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Partner begins or stops work	26
Personal injury or illness	53
Pregnancy	40
Retirement	45
Revision of personal habits	24
Sexual difficulties	39
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with boss	23
Trouble with in-laws	29
Vacation	13

Your Total

What Does It Mean?

The more changes you have, the more likely you are to get sick. Of those people with over 300 Life Change Units, almost 90% get sick in the near future; with 150 to 299 Life Change Units, about 50% get sick in the near future; and with less than 150 Life Change Units, only about 30% get sick in the near future. (Holmes & Rahe, 1967, Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Vol. 11)

Other Factors to Consider

Stress and Gender

Research tells us that men and women react differently to stress and that differing situations create their stress. For example, one study done at the University of Alberta found that women wake in the morning with their lowest stress levels. These levels climb as they rush around the house getting everyone ready for work and school. Their stress levels rise until they get to work, when they begin to drop back a bit. Their stress levels slowly rise again during the day and continue to rise as they come home and look after kids, dinner, and household chores. Their stress levels usually don't drop again until they are ready for bed.

Men on the other hand rise with lower stress levels—usually lower than their mate's stress levels if he is married. Their stress levels don't rise significantly until the drive to work. Then levels begin a slow climb that continues throughout their day. However, as they leave work their stress levels begin to drop and continue dropping after they arrive home. Generally they go to bed with low stress levels.

This is a generalized version of what happens to stress levels with each gender. Of course, there are many variations of this scenario: women without children and high pressure jobs, and men whose stress levels begin to rise the minute their feet hit the floor in the morning and who are in demand until the end of the day.

Stress and Your Health

Stress is the number one health problem in the world today!

Problems stress can cause include:

- Heart attacks or strokes
- Drug abuse
- Ulcers
- Physical illness
- Hypertension
- Migraines
- High cholesterol
- Insomnia
- Depression

Stress is about attitude. Stress alone does not cause illness. Stress is neutral until it lands on us. What we choose to do about it determines how it will affect us.

Session Three: What is Stress About?

Stress is about changing lifestyles.

How is your life different from that of your parents?

How do these differences affect your stress levels?

Stress is about power.

How? We are more stressed when we feel powerless to change the way things are. Stress is an equal opportunity opponent. Stress affects people of every age and every culture, regardless of whether you are male or female.

Stress is about self-esteem.

When our self-esteem is high, we feel more powerful and therefore less stressed. When our self-esteem is low, we feel like we have no power to make any changes and that can cause us more stress.

Stress is about change.

Change itself is stressful. Even if we don't like the situation we find ourselves in, if we are familiar with being in that situation, or if we feel that at least we know what will happen when we are in this situation, we find it less stressful than we think it might be making changes and stepping into the unknown.

Flexibility

How can we keep ourselves flexible, which will make change easier?

Eustress

Don't forget that stress isn't all bad. In 1974, Richard Lazarus coined the term "eustress" to define types of stress that are healthy.

Can you think of some examples?

Positive stress motivates, increases energy levels, and can drive people forward to embrace the work before them.

What about having no stress at all? An absence of stress can actually lead to boredom or frustration. When people who enjoy a variety of activities as a part of their day suddenly find themselves caught up, they can actually become bored and experience feelings of fatigue. A balance of positive stress is ideal, although the human component of that is that each person responds as an individual. So, what is good stress for one person can be negative for another.

Case Study

Carrie's Day

Carrie feels like she's always on a merry-go-round, with no time to relax. She's noticed that she's had more colds than usual this winter.

With a partner, take a look at what Carrie's day usually looks like. Then, use the discussion questions to help you find a solution for her.

6:30 a.m.	The sound of the alarm wakes Carrie up. She usually finds it tough to get out of bed.
6:30 a.m.-7:15 a.m.	Carrie has a cigarette, a cup of coffee, and a sweet roll for breakfast. She then showers and gets dressed.
7:15 a.m.-7:45 a.m.	Carrie wakes her daughter. She gets her dressed, fed, and ready for the day at the babysitter's.
7:45 a.m.-8:15 a.m.	Carrie leaves the house, drops her daughter off at the babysitter's, and heads to the office.
8:15 a.m.	Carrie arrives at the office. She has a second cup of coffee and a bag of chips.
8:15 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Carrie handles problems, attends meetings, types correspondence, and does whatever needs doing. She feels there are too many interruptions, too little time, and too much frantic activity.
12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m.	Carrie rarely takes an actual lunch break. She usually eats fast food at her desk, or she runs out to do personal errands, and skips lunch altogether. She tries to grab a cigarette, too.
2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.	Carrie completes her workday. She feels like she never gets a chance to have a break, and she rarely leaves the office before 5 p.m. She often feels stressed because her babysitter gets annoyed if her daughter is not picked up by 5:30 p.m.
5:00 p.m.-5:45 p.m.	Carrie leaves work and picks up her daughter.
5:45 p.m.-6:00 p.m.	Carrie drinks a cup of coffee or two and has a few more

	cigarettes to unwind. Then, she and her daughter eat out, or she pops a couple of TV dinners in the oven and they eat while watching cartoons.
6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.	Carrie and her daughter watch TV, usually while snacking.
8:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.	Carrie puts her daughter to bed.
8:30 p.m.-12:00 a.m.	Carrie does housework and pays bills. She usually doesn't get to sleep until well after midnight because so many things are running through her head. This pattern of living has taken its toll, and Carrie is just beginning to pay the price.

What do you see as the major problem here?

What connection do you see between Carrie's lifestyle and her job problems?

What advice would you give Carrie?

The "Less Stress" Lessons

Relaxation techniques are crucial for managing stress. Let's talk about some techniques that you can use anywhere, any time.

Body Scan

In order to relax, we must first learn where, when, and how we store tension in our body. Do you know where you store your tension?

Breathing Through Your Diaphragm

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, once said, "Our breath is the bridge from our body to our mind."

Stretching

Stretching is good exercise that you can do anywhere, anytime.

Visualization

You can use the power of your mind to reduce stress. Visualize the most peaceful scene you can think of—a snowfall, a waterfall, a lake, the seashore with waves crashing against the beach. Use that same visualization when you are feeling stressed.

Sensory Awareness

Shakespeare once said, "There's not a minute of our lives should stretch without some pleasure." Keep some pleasant scents and textured objects around to give yourself a moment's distraction when needed.

Eating Awareness

When eating, don't let anything else interrupt; savor your food rather than inhaling it.

Session Five: Mental Strategies

Changing Ourselves

These three factors impact our ability to manage stress:

- Personality
- Nature of Organization
- Quality of Support

Which of these three can we change?

Personality

It's true that we can't change our personality, although we can make some small changes. For example, if we are very impatient with other people, we can learn to be a little more patient with them. Impatient people can alienate others, and they run the risk of having a stroke or a heart attack. Learning some tactics to curb our impatience could save our life.

Nature of Organization

We can't change the organization we work for, either, unless we own it. However, if the stress is truly getting to us, we can change jobs. That is a drastic measure to be sure. However, assess what makes your workplace such a toxic environment. Is it the work or is it the people? Can the stress be at least in part your reaction to what is happening? If your workplace is truly too demanding, then save yourself. Find another place to work.

However, if you are stressed out because nobody has ever told you what is expected of you, then talk to your supervisor about what he/she expects of you. If you feel like you need more training to do your job, ask for training. Perhaps you can find a mentor, or a buddy. Or perhaps your company will send you to external training.

Quality of Support

One thing we can always change is the nature of the supportive relationships we have. How?

- We can have them at work, socially, and at home.
- They can be both friends and family.
- They can be stronger than they are now. To do this, we can ask for help.
- Keep in mind that relationships are reciprocal so be a better friend or supporter yourself, and develop a wider circle of support.

The Triple A Approach

When we have situations that cause our stress levels to rise, we have three basic strategies we can use. We can alter or change the situation, figure out how to avoid the situation, or accept the situation and alter our response to it.

Alter

Sometimes this is the most promising strategy. Let's say you are always stressed when you are going to be late for a meeting. Change the situation by setting an alarm so you will leave five or ten minutes earlier. Write the appointment down with a 15 minute cushion. For example, if you have a doctor's appointment at 2:30, write it in your planner for 2:15. Here's another example: Every time your mother-in-law comes for a visit your hackles rise and you are in a bad mood the whole time she is there. How might you alter that situation? You could make reservations for her to stay at a nearby hotel, buy a bouquet of flowers for her room so you start off on the right foot, or get to know her better—maybe you've just never seen her good side.

Avoid

On the other hand, that mouthy neighbor may be somebody you can avoid. You know cheese gives you a migraine so you avoid it. You know that your spouse prefers to eat breakfast at 7 am sharp so you accommodate that preference. Forcing ourselves into situations that make us stressed, when we really don't have to be in those situations, is just being a masochist. (By the way, don't decide to avoid your mother-in-law. That just transfers the stress you feel onto your spouse and that isn't fair.)

Accept

There are some things in life, like taxes, that are unavoidable so we may as well accept these situations with good grace. Let's say going to the dentist makes you stressed. Accept that and deal with it accordingly. Play music before you go. Give yourself some positive self-talk like, "By this time tomorrow it will be all over," "I won't have to do this again for six months," or, "I can handle this."

Session Six: Stress at Work

The Stress Tax

Costs of stress on the job can include:

- Errors
- Absenteeism
- Conflict
- Low morale
- High staff turnover
- Poor decisions/no decisions
- Accidents

What are the symptoms of stress overload, when our bodies have responded too many times to the "fight or flight" call?

We all pay a stress tax, whether we know it or not. What is the price you pay for your stress? What do you need to change? Not sure yet whether you need to make any changes? Try the Stress Inventory to see if you are in danger of burning out.

Stress Inventory

Rate each statement as it applies to you on a scale of 1 to 5 with a 1 meaning never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 often, and 5 always.

Score	Statement
	I am unclear about what is expected of me.
	My co-workers seem unclear what my job is.
	I have differences of opinion with my superiors.
	The demands of others for my time are in conflict.
	I lack confidence in management.
	Management expects me to interrupt my work for new priorities.
	Conflict exists between my unit and others it must work with.
	I get feedback only when my performance is unsatisfactory.
	Decisions or changes that affect me are made without my knowledge or involvement.
	I am expected to accept the decisions of others without being told their rationale.
	I have too much to do and too little time in which to do it.
	I do not have enough work to do.
	I feel overqualified for the work I actually do.
	I feel under-qualified for the work I actually do.
	I have unsettled conflicts with my co-workers.
	I get no support from my co-workers.
	I spend my time fighting fires rather than working according to a plan.
	I do not have enough supervision (too much or too little).

	I do not have the opportunity to use my knowledge and skills.
	I do not receive meaningful work assignments.
	I feel that it is hopeless to change the system.
	My pay is too low.
	My department or agency lacks enough funds to accomplish its goals.
	I have too much paperwork for me to do an effective job.
	It seems like I have to make all the decisions around the office.
	I feel exhausted even when I get enough sleep.
	I get angry or irritated easily.
	I worry at night and have trouble sleeping.
	I have recurring headaches, stomach aches, or lower back pain.
	I find it difficult to unwind at the end of the day.
	I find it difficult to empathize with clients about their problems.
	I tend to categorize clients rather than listen to their individual needs.
	I generally seem to express negative attitudes.
	I have been increasing my use of tobacco, drugs, or alcohol.
	I find that I am always watching the clock.
	TOTAL

Scoring

If you scored:

- Below 35: You are in good shape and show almost no job stress.
- 36-70: You show a low amount of job-related stress and are not likely to burn out.
- 71-105: You are under a moderate amount of job-related stress and have a fair chance of burning out.
- 106-140: You express a high amount of job-related stress and may have begun to burn out.
- Over 140: You show an excessive amount of job-related stress and probably are in an advanced phase of burnout.

Finding Some Solutions

Item with High Rating	Solutions

Stress Logging

If you find that you feel very stressed at work, and you're not sure why, it can be useful to keep a stress log for a week to see what's going on. Include the follow items:

- Write the date at the top of each day.
- Write the time and what happened.
- Rate the event on a scale of one to 10, where one is a minimum of stress, five is, "I feel like I need a break," and 10 is, "I'm going to blow a gasket."
- Leave room for any comments or thoughts.

Monday, June 15			
Time	Event	Rating	Comments
8:15 a.m.	Stuck in traffic	3	Why did I get so upset and let this ruin my morning?
10:30 a.m.	Bob messed up his report, so my report will be delayed	8	
12:05 p.m.	Pizza shop messed up my order	8	I really overreacted at the cook. ☹️
3:30 p.m.	My manager complained about my late report	6	
5:15 p.m.	Was late leaving the office and picking my son up	5	Luckily his babysitter is nice!

Once you have logged your stressful events, you can do something about them using the triple A approach we discussed earlier. For example, if you got stuck in traffic four out of five days and that caused you stress, perhaps you can find a different route to work or leave at a different time. Note that you can use this for almost any situation in your life.

Session Eight: Stress at Home

Budgeting Basics

Finances are a common cause of stress. Not having enough money to pay the bills can wreak havoc on an individual and a family. Plus, finances can limit recreational activities, which reduce your ways to relieve stress. Talk about a vicious cycle!

At the beginning of every month, sit down with yourself (and your spouse, if you have one) and create a budget. You can use a piece of paper and a calculator, a spreadsheet program, or a personal accounting package – whatever works for you.

Make sure you account for the necessities, like mortgage or rent, car payments, debt payments, heat, light, groceries, and gas. Don't forget to budget for some fun stuff too, even if it's only \$20. Savings are another important part of your budget – if your car breaks down and you're stuck with a repair bill, it can be less stressful to take it out of the savings account than to put it on a credit card.

If you find yourself struggling to make ends meet, talk to a debt counselor to help reduce your financial stresses.

If you have an extremely high-end or low-end lifestyle, consider whether you can make changes to reduce your stress level. Spending tons of time and/or money on maintaining expensive cars, homes, and boats may not be wise if it's causing you stress. Likewise, pinching every penny when it's not necessary might not be worth it.

The Everyday Stuff

A lot of work goes into running a household. The good news is that a little planning can go a long way towards reducing household stress and arguments.

Chore Charts

Every member of the family over the age of two should participate in household chores. Small children can place their clothes in the laundry hamper, make their bed, set the table, and feed pets. Older children can help cook meals (particularly if it's an easy chore like mixing up a salad kit), walk the dog, and load the dishwasher.

It can also be helpful to identify who wants to do what. We all have chores that we don't mind doing, and chores that we hate, so if you can find some overlap, life will be easier on everyone.

Another option, particularly if you live alone or have a small family, is to hire out some of the chores, such as mowing the lawn. Just make sure you're not causing yourself financial stress!

Meal Planning

Sitting down on the weekend and planning your meals for the next week, and then going grocery shopping with a list, accomplishes several things.

- During the week, you don't have to worry about what to cook or if you have the supplies in the house.
- When you get home from work, you shouldn't have to rush back out to the grocery store.
- You will be more likely to eat healthy food and less likely to stop at your local restaurant.
- Cooking at home is better for your wallet and your waistline.
- Sitting down as a family and eating supper together is a great activity.

Here are some tips for meal planning:

- Choose recipes that are quick and easy to make.
- Purchase foods that reduce preparation time, such as pre-cooked chicken pieces or salad kits.
- Slow cooker meals are great any time of the year.
- Involve everyone in meal preparation. It can be fun to have a different family member cook every night, or to have someone responsible for the salad, another person responsible for the meat, and so on.

- Theme nights are a lot of fun. Meals like pizza and tacos can be easily customized by each member of the family.
- Keep frozen pizzas on hand, and allow yourself takeout once every week or two.

Organization Tips

Keeping Things Un-Cluttered

Organizing Paper

Getting Motivated

Caring for Pets and Kids

Keeping Track

Session Nine: Drainers and Fillers

Personal Drainers

Visualize the way you usually spend your day. Then list the least rewarding aspects of your day – those places/activities/people/conditions that diminish your energy.

Activities/Conditions/Places /People That...	At Home	At Work	At Play
Annoy you			
Anger you			
Distract you			
Depress you			
Worry you			
Wear you out			
Bore you			
Frustrate you			

Personal Fillers

Visualize the way you usually spend your day. Then list the better aspects of your day – those places/activities/people/conditions that renew your energy and well-being.

Activities/Conditions/Places /People That...	At Home	At Work	At Play
Excite you			
Calm you			
Free you			
Bring you joy			
Support/nurture you			
Stimulate/challenge you			
Give you meaning			
Make you laugh			
Energize you			

A party where you wouldn't know many people.

A new job in a new company.

A move to another part of the country.

A 500 mile drive that takes you alone through some rather isolated country.

A trip to downtown Boston with friends, you doing the driving.

A flight to Vancouver to attend a conference.

A dinner party for your spouse's or partner's family.

An afternoon of Christmas shopping in a large mall.

A Personal Action Plan

This guide will lead you step-by-step through a creative planning process for coping with stress. It draws on your internal wisdom, so spend more time on the questions that strike you as particularly meaningful.

Summarize your symptoms. What is wrong? Where are you experiencing pain? What are you worried about? What signals are indicating stresses in your life?

Define the problem from several perspectives. What is the source of your stress? Write three or four different descriptions of the problem. Which one most clearly captures the cause of your stress?

Learn from your previous attempts to solve the problem. What coping strategies have you already tried? Why didn't they work? What new strategies are suggested by these previous failures?

Check your attitude. How do you feel about this problem and your capability to deal with it?

hopeless

doubtful

may be possible

hopeful

What about your desire to tackle the problem and do something about it?

motivated willing to try partially committed highly motivated

Identify your resources. What special strengths and skills can you bring to bear on the problem? Who will support you in the process?

Specify your goals. What do you want to happen? To feel? To change? To accomplish? To increase or decrease? To learn? Be very specific.

I want _____

Formulate a clear plan of action. Based on the changes you want to make and the goals you've set, what specifically can you do?

Recommended Reading List

- Alexander, Jane. *The Weekend Healer*. Gaia Books, 2002.
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