

IS STRESS GETTING YOU DOWN?

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

Is stress getting you down? Do you blame finances? Relationship? Work? Politics? Has life become a balancing act? It's easy to get caught up in a whirlwind of activity and wind up spinning your wheels - feeling as though you've accomplished nothing!

Does this sound like you? If so, it may be comforting to know you're not alone. How do you spell stress? L-I-F-E! No one gets through life without stress!

Simply put, stress is our body's reaction to a *perceived* threat or danger. Something happens. We perceive it as threatening. And, our internal alarm triggers a stress response: Muscles tense and heart rate increases, and blood pressure and respiration elevate.

These automatic responses are helpful in readying our bodies for defense, but, don't serve us well when we're defending against modern day woes such as traffic, work problems, and relationship difficulties. Too much stress takes its toll. We are constantly bombarded with ill effects of stress on our health: heart disease, diabetes, physical ailments, depression and anxiety.

I use practical approaches to stress management:

- **Action-oriented** approach (do something differently - avoid stressful situations –make plans in advance to avoid frustrations).
- **Emotional-oriented** approach (learn to think differently and *shift* your emotions surrounding a stressful situation – instead of becoming angry and frustrated about delays, see the glass as “half full” and change your way of looking at the world - use humor).
- **Acceptance-oriented** approach (recognize the limits of your ability to change situations and realize there are some things you must just accept –you may not like it, but “such is life”).

Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. A healthy diet, exercise, and a strong support system are essential, but if these don't help, find someone to talk to. Friends and family can often help – if not - call a professional counselor. That's why we're here.