

Beat Chronic Stress in 2010

By: Gail Lisson, Psy.D

Congratulations on surviving the stressful events of 2009. If you are still deciding on a New Year's resolution for 2010, reducing chronic stress can be one of the most important ways to improve your health during the upcoming year.

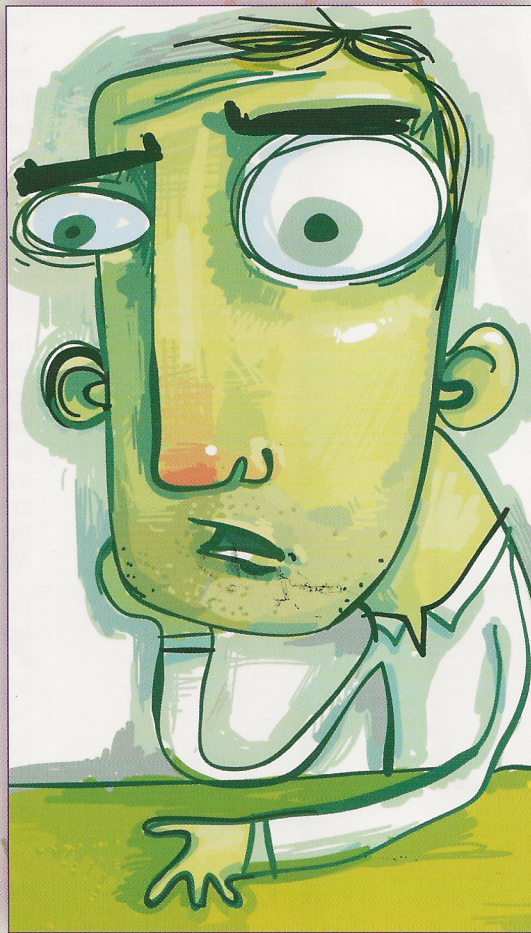
Everyone can agree we are living in stressful times. What precipitates stress varies from individual to individual. Stress can manifest physically and emotionally and, when untreated, has been demonstrated to increase one's risk of heart disease, depression, anxiety disorders, obesity (related to emotionally-driven eating), gastrointestinal distress, a weakened immune system, and insomnia.

Psychologists identify three types of stress: acute, chronic and post-traumatic. Let's focus on chronic stress because this can lead to serious health problems. Symptoms of chronic stress include: fatigue, chest pain or pressure, fast heart rate, dizziness, shakiness, difficulty breathing, irregular menstrual cycles, erectile dysfunction, loss of sex drive, loss of appetite, overeating, problems sleeping and abdominal pain or diarrhea.

Why not consider making your 2010 New Year's resolution to identify and eliminate chronic stress in your life? Here are 10 recommendations to reduce chronic stress in 2010.

1. Begin regular, moderate exercise: A simple 15-minute walk per day can reduce stress.
2. Maintain regular sleep habits: Most people need to sleep at least 6 to 8 hours per night. Maintaining a regular sleep schedule and reducing caffeine are two simple ways to improve the quality of your sleep.
3. Practice relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, several times per day.
4. Get organized. It's much easier to remain focused and calm during life's stressors when you can find your cell phone, car keys, and checkbook. Make lists and refer to them often. Organization will improve efficiency with daily tasks and lead to more free time. Remember...chance favors the prepared mind.
5. Manage your time appropriately. Trying to be three places at one time is a recipe for disaster. Spending your weeks harried and rushed will exacerbate chronic stress.
6. Reduce overspending, which can lead to financial distress. Create a monthly
7. Re-evaluate and reduce your personal and family-related commitments. Maybe driving your kids to 10 extracurricular activities each week is just too much.
8. Resolve or terminate stressful personal relationships. This can be a challenge, especially if the relationship involves a family member, close personal friend or spouse. You will likely need family or professional support to successfully navigate this potential minefield.
9. Resolve work-related stress, when possible. Some positions are inherently stressful (i.e. law enforcement, etc.) However, by reducing drama with co-workers, focusing on the job at hand, and communicating effectively, stress in the workplace can be kept to a minimum.
10. Avoid smoking, alcohol and drug use as a means to manage stress. While these habits might provide immediate and temporary relief, they will eventually increase chronic stress over time. Stress can precipitate a prescription medication chemical dependency. If you find yourself using more prescription medications (i.e. sleep, anti-anxiety, or pain medications) than safely prescribed, consult your doctor to prevent addiction.

Even utilizing only one strategy to reduce stress can yield encouraging results and foster a sense of accomplishment that meets your 2010 resolution.



Dr. Lisson is a licensed clinical psychologist in the states of North Carolina and Florida and is fellowship-trained in health psychology. Her expertise includes working with patients who experience stress related to their medical problems, promoting better medical compliance and health care behavior and evaluating patients for surgical risk and readiness. To learn more about Dr. Lisson and her solo, private practice at the Center for Health Solutions, PLLC, please visit her website at www.gailisson.com