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Written By: Matthew K. Norton- Doctor of Chiropractic

Summer Stress Strategies

Question: I know that summer is supposed to be a time of family, fireworks, and travel adventures, and I should be happy, but I often feel stressed, anxious, and even somewhat depressed. Most people wouldn't guess, but I feel overwhelmed with all the needs and expectations of others and lose track of me in the process. Then I feel guilty for having selfish thoughts.

I think my feelings, even though I try to conceal them, are negatively affecting my husband and kids but I don't know what to do. I'm wondering if my headaches, fatigue, and back pain are connected at all to my emotional state.

Do you have any insights to help me better understand my problem and some strategies I could use to improve it?

Answer: First, it is important that you understand you are not alone in your challenging circumstances and uncomfortable feelings. Yours is a common dilemma, especially as you move further into your career and parenting years, but one you can be more victorious in.

Stress is simply a force that creates pressure tied into the many challenges and adversities you face every day. The real issue is whether you are prepared for these hurdles and what your perspective will be as you greet them.

Anxiety and frustration are often the result of being overextended with activities and demands that don't provide enough life-giving fuel to sustain a positive mental/emotional state. When your vitality tank gets low, it is difficult to avoid becoming overwhelmed. If this condition persists, depression often follows as it becomes more difficult to figure out how to travel the road back to living in joyful satisfaction.

If your depression becomes severe, you should seek out professional assistance right away.

You are correct in proposing that persistent negative stress, defined by Dr. Kenneth Cooper as “pressures that cause you to feel tired, distracted, anxious, confused, or upset,” will eventually lead to physical breakdown. These are important clues to pay attention to. According to a recent Harvard Medical School report, “ongoing negative stress contributes to an increased risk of heart disease, cancer, migraines, asthma, and ulcers.” Neurologist Richard Restak in his book *The Longevity Strategy* discussed its damage to learning and memory.

However, your brain can be positively rewired and your body can heal in a powerful way when its persistent “alarm” state is resolved through intentional lifestyle and perspective changes.

It is important to give to others out of your fullness, so your energy must be regularly replenished. Your social interaction should flow from a solid center of inner strength and fulfillment so that you’re not expecting other people to make you happy and meet your needs.

There are several key actions for breaking the pattern of your emotional downward spiral. They will liberate you to replace it with a resilient enthusiasm that makes each day a rewarding adventure.

- 1) Make sure you find a way to touch your passionate interests and values each day and then allow your energy to spill over onto others. “What you love is a sign of what you are to do.” – Sanaya Roman**
- 2) Balance strategic assertiveness with refraining from trying to control what is beyond your control. Take action rather than assuming a passive victim stance but then balance this with release through prayer.**
- 3) Exercise your mind and body each day. Increase your capacity to handle more challenge by expanding who you are. Physical exercise shifts stress from its negative to positive form.**
- 4) Make your health a top priority because you can’t trade in your body for a new model. All of your feelings (pleasant or not) are based upon circulating chemicals directed by your brain and nervous system. Get help as needed to manage them well.**

- 5) **Learn from Plato as to the right way of living. “Life must be lived as play.”**
- 6) **Find humor, experience gratefulness, and extend love and forgiveness.**

Matthew Norton D.C. has over 23 years of clinical expertise in patient care. He is a frequent speaker with numerous published articles and author of the upcoming book *Are You in Pain? Dr. Norton's Surprising Stories, Insights, and Action Plan to Help You Solve It...NOW!* www.DrMatthewNorton.com