Everyone agrees: Life is stressful. Too much stress is related to a variety of health problems, including increased risk for heart disease. Learning about stress and how to manage it will improve both your physical and emotional health, and your overall quality of life.

Stressors can be real or imagined. Most things you worry about in life – your stressors – never happen. The source of stressors may be social, psychological, or physical. Examples of stressors are provided below.

**Social Stressors**
- Relationships with friends and family
- Relationships with boss/co-workers
- Time constraints
- Demands and expectations of others

**Psychological Stressors**
- Feelings
- Fears
- Decisions
- Boredom
- Frustrations
- Confidence/self-esteem

**Physical Stressors**
- Noise
- Weather (too hot; too cold)
- Traffic
- Over-crowding
- Excess light or darkness
- Health problems
- Lack of sleep

The effect a stressor has on you is called the "stress response." The stress response has also been called the "fight or flight" response. When you are faced with a stressor, your body experiences a series of physical changes intended to help you fight the stressor or flee from it. These changes are complex and involve the nervous system and the endocrine (hormones) system.
Some common physical responses to stress include:

- Fast heartbeat
- Rapid breathing
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased body temperature and perspiring
- Muscle tension causing goose bumps and making hair stand on end
- Increased blood sugar level to use as energy
- Dilation of the pupils to enhance vision
- Blood flow directed to muscles and liver (hands and feet feel cold)
- Increased blood clotting for protection if injured

For early humans, the "fight or flight" response was their means of survival. Today, most stressful situations don't require a fight or flight response to survive. In fact, in today's world, you are more likely to let stressors build up or become excessive before taking action. Unfortunately, if left unchecked, stress can cause problems to your health and well being.

Not all stress is bad. Some stress is needed for growth and challenge. One goal of stress management is to shift from always viewing stress as negative and damaging, to viewing it, whenever possible, as something that is positive, inevitable, and necessary.

Examples of positive stress could be:

- A job promotion
- Marriage
- Birth of a new baby

How you respond to a stressor can be exciting, a positive feeling, or overwhelming, which can lead to negative feelings. At the earliest signs of excitement or stress, take steps to prevent negative feelings, which can lead to anxiety and depression.

There are two main types of stress that increase your risk of heart disease:

1. Stressful situations that cause you to become angry, hostile, aggressive or to lose your temper.
2. Stressful situations where you feel out of control.

Learning to manage these types of stressful situations can help reduce your risk of developing heart disease or of making your condition worse if you already have heart disease.
Stress is unique for each individual. The way you respond to a stressor depends on how stressful you personally perceive the stressor to be. What is highly stressful for your neighbor may not be stressful at all to you.

Sources of Stress:

Major life events cause stress. While you may be prepared to handle one major event, multiple events within a short period of time may present a serious problem. Review the list of major life events given below. Check any that have occurred in your life during the past 12 months.

- ___ Changed Jobs
- ___ Retired
- ___ Sexual Problems
- ___ Death of Family Member
- ___ Trouble with In-Laws
- ___ Retraining
- ___ Marriage
- ___ Severe Personal Injury or Illness
- ___ Death of Close Friend
- ___ Child Left Home
- ___ Fired
- ___ Divorce
- ___ Serious Illness in Family
- ___ Major Financial Change
- ___ Spouse Changed Jobs
- ___ Laid Off
- ___ Separation
- ___ Stopped Smoking or Drinking
- ___ Major Business Change

If you have experienced one or more of the major life events in the past year, you may benefit from learning stress management skills.

Symptoms of Stress:

Chronic stress--stress that doesn't go away--can cause health problems. These problems may be associated with both physical and emotional symptoms of stress.
Assessing Symptoms:

Review the list of common symptoms of stress below and check any you experience with stress.

___ Tension headaches  ___ Tension headaches  ___ Migraine headaches
___ Stomach aches / acidity  ___ Increase in blood pressure  ___ Cold hands and feet
___ Shallow rapid breathing  ___ Diarrhea  ___ Heart palpitations
___ Shaky hands  ___ Burping  ___ Gassiness
___ Fatigue/ exhausted feeling  ___ Panting  ___ Sighing
___ Dry mouth  ___ Neck stiffness  ___ Grinding teeth / clenched jaw
___ Jaw pain  ___ Constipation  ___ Tightness in chest
___ Dizziness  ___ Nausea/vomiting  ___ Skin blemishes / rash
___ Colitis  ___ Asthma  ___ Indigestion
___ Hyperventilation  ___ Arthritis  ___ Allergy
___ Sexual dysfunction  ___ Sleep disturbance  ___ Social withdrawal
___ Hostile behavior  ___ Alcohol or drug abuse  ___ Excessive or compulsive smoking
___ Unexplained pain  ___ Overeating  ___ Agitation
___ Indecision  ___ Forgetfulness  ___ Disorganization
___ Difficulty coping with job  ___ Problems concentrating  ___ Biting nails
___ Twirling strands of hair  ___ Daydreaming  ___ Depression
___ Irritability  ___ Nervous laughter  ___ Crying easily
___ Bad dreams  ___ Suspicion  ___ Backache
Assessing Management:

Check the one that best applies:

1. How would you rate the usual degree of stress in your personal/home life?
   _____ A great deal of stress
   _____ Some stress
   _____ Hardly any stress

2. How would you rate the usual degree of stress in your job?
   _____ A great deal of stress
   _____ Some stress
   _____ Hardly any stress

3. How well do you feel you manage the stress in your life?
   (Rate on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 = very well; 5 = not well at all)
   _____ Personal/home life
   _____ Job-related

If you rate your stress management as 3 or above, you could probably benefit from learning stress management techniques.

Below are some of the ways people deal with stress:

Some are positive and healthy; others are clearly negative. Some can be either positive or negative, depending on how they are used. Which of the following do you usually do to reduce tension and anxiety?

_____ Talk to someone you can trust
_____ Don’t think about it
_____ Watch TV
_____ Take a drug
_____ Get angry or "blow up"
_____ Get involved in a hobby
_____ Laugh
_____ Read
_____ Do some kind of exercise
_____ Other (list)

_____ Smoke or use smokeless tobacco
_____ Eat
_____ Have an alcoholic drink
_____ Listen to or perform music
_____ Go to sleep
_____ Do nothing
_____ Pray or other religious practice
_____ Cry
_____ Practice a relaxation technique (deep breathing, meditation, muscle relaxation)
There are many ways to relax. Some of the most useful stress management techniques are described below. Choose a technique you think you will enjoy. Practice it and incorporate it into your life.

**Deep Breathing Exercises**

Shallow and rapid breathing is a natural response to stress. With shallow breathing less oxygen is taken in with each breath. Deep breathing can reverse this effect. It can also help relieve stress-related headaches, backaches, stomach aches, and sleeplessness. Deep breathing is often the first step in other stress management techniques such as visualization, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation. You can do deep breathing anytime, anywhere. It can be done sitting, standing, or lying down, as long as you are comfortable. Wear loose clothing or loosen your tie, belt, or buttons. A quiet place is recommended, although not necessary.

1. Begin by breathing in slowly and deeply through your nose. While breathing in, count to five and silently say the word "in" to yourself. Notice that your abdomen relaxes as your lungs fill with air.
2. After the count of five, purse your lips and let the air escape slowly as you count to five and say the word "out" to yourself.

Repeat the exercise (up to five minutes, if time permits). With practice, you may be able to count to 10 during each phase of the exercise. You can increase your relaxation if you imagine breathing in ocean air, the scent of flowers or forest air and visualize a restful place.

**Visualization**

Visualization is very effective when used with deep breathing exercises. With practice, visualization can be one of the easiest stress management techniques for you to do.

1. After a few minutes of deep breathing, create a picture in your mind of a scene in which you are perfectly relaxed. Continue deep breathing.
2. Involve your senses as you continue to visualize this special place. What sounds do you hear? How does your skin feel? What smells are in the air? Continue deep breathing.
3. Focus on this scene until you feel as relaxed as if you were really there.

Some people are uncomfortable trying to use visualization to relax. They feel they are just daydreaming and wasting time. It’s important, however, to give your mind a rest, especially when feeling stressed.
Visualizations that may be relaxing for you:

- Lying on a secluded beach
- Walking in a rain forest
- Standing at the top of a beautiful mountain range
- Lying in a field of grass and flowers
- Sailing on a boat in the ocean
- Sitting in front of a glowing fire

**Meditation**

The objective of meditation is to clear the mind. There are many ways to meditate. Begin with a 10-minute session and gradually work up to 20 minutes. It takes regular practice, day after day, to benefit from meditation. Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Dim the lights.

1. Sit in a straight chair with your feet on the floor and your hands in your lap with your palms up. Check your posture to be sure you are balanced and centered, as if a string were attached to the top of your head pulling you upright. Keep your body as still as possible. Focus your eyes on a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you. Let your eyelids droop nearly closed.
2. Start with deep breathing exercises. Breathe from your abdomen rather than your chest. As you exhale, count "one." Continue counting up to five, or higher if you can.
3. Try to clear your mind of all thoughts, sounds, or body sensations. If thoughts enter your mind and you forget to count, dismiss the thoughts and start again at one. Many thoughts will enter your mind as you meditate, but let them pass through or push them out.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Progressive muscle relaxation helps you become more aware of where muscle tension is in your body. It can also help calm other reactions to stress, such as rapid breathing and a fast pulse. Many people use progressive muscle relaxation to relieve stress-related headaches and sleeplessness.

In the beginning, it is best to do this exercise lying down. Choose a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for at least 20 minutes.

1. Relax your entire body as much as possible. Begin with deep breathing exercises.
2. You will begin with the muscles of your feet and work upward on the body, calves, thighs, buttocks, abdomen, hands, arms, and shoulders. End with the face, mouth, jaw, eyes, and scalp.
3. With each muscle group, contract the muscles as you inhale. Hold the contraction briefly, then relax and exhale. Let the tension flow out with each breath. Notice the feel of the muscles as they contract and relax.
4. Allow more time for the relaxation phase of the exercise. If a muscle seems very tense, repeat the contraction with that muscle group.
5. After progressing through all the muscle groups, lie very still for five minutes as you continue deep breathing and experience the relaxed feeling.
6. When you are ready to get up, count backward from ten to one. Get up slowly and carefully.

Do progressive muscle relaxation daily for best results. Combine it with visualization or meditation. Over time, you can even learn to do this technique while sitting upright.

**Stretching**

Your muscles tighten in response to stresses. When the tension is held and the muscles are not used, waste products remain to cause pain and discomfort. Most people hold tension in their head, neck and shoulder areas. This is called the “stress triangle.” Learning how to relax the muscles in this area can help you relieve stress and tension headaches. The base of the triangle is the mid-points between your shoulders and your neck. The top of the triangle is on your forehead between your eyes.

Performing 6 to 12 repetitions of these simple stretches and rolls can help you relieve tightness in your stress triangle. You can do these stretches anywhere. If you are performing a tedious task, stop frequently to do these stretches.

- **Neck Roll**—Keeping your left shoulder level, stretch your right ear to your right shoulder. Roll your head down so your chin is on your chest. Repeat the stretch on your left side. Do rolls only from side to side. Do not let your head drop back.
- **Shoulder Shrug**—Lift your shoulders up and make large circles going forward and back. You can rotate both shoulders or stretch only one at a time.
- **Overhead Stretch**—With one hand, reach up as if you were picking an apple from a tree slightly ahead and far above you. Repeat with the other hand.
- **Standing Body Roll**—Roll your head forward until your chin is on your chest. Bend your knees slightly and continue rolling down until your hands are hanging near your knees. Rest there a moment, then slowly roll back up.

**Self-Massage**

You can learn to give yourself a massage. Massage can relax muscles, relieve muscle spasms and pain, increase blood flow in the skin and muscles, ease mental stress, and help you feel more relaxed. Use massage oil or lotion if desired for a smoother massage. Avoid exerting heavy pressure on the spinal column or other bony areas.

1. **Shoulders and Back of Neck**
   - While sitting upright, massage your stress triangle. Use your right hand to work on your left shoulder and left hand on your right shoulder. Work your fingers gently but firmly, beginning with your shoulder blade, moving up toward the back of the neck and including the scalp. Repeat each stroke four times.
• Use a circular motion to massage the thick, muscular part of your shoulder at the base of your neck. Gradually increase the pressure. Use the right hand for the left shoulder and the left hand for the right shoulder. (Note: Do not massage the sides or front of the neck. This can be dangerous.)

2. Head and Face
• Use your fingers to apply pressure on your forehead, between your eyes (top point of your stress triangle).
• Place your thumbs on the area below your brow bone close to your nose. Apply gentle pressure.
• Use your fingers to gently rub the areas of the temples and behind your ears with circular motions.
• Rub your scalp with a gentle and rapid motion as though shampooing your hair.

3. Feet
• While sitting on a chair or on the floor, rest one foot on the opposite thigh. Use your thumbs to rub the full length of your foot, from the heel to the toes and back. Repeat several times.
• Wrap your fingers around the top of your foot and your thumbs around the bottom. Squeeze with your thumbs, starting at the arch and moving up to the toes. Repeat several times.
• Take each toe between your fingers and gently roll it back and forth. Rub the area between the toes.
• Holding your ankle in one hand and your toes in the other, rotate your foot first in one direction, then in the other.

Massage is even more relaxing if someone else does it for you. Many health professionals practice massage, or you can go to a licensed massage therapist.
COPING WITH STRESS

Most people cope with too much stress by either avoiding the situation or approaching the problem. "Avoiders" wish the problem would go away or try to withdraw from it. "Approachers" may worry and fret, but try to get the situation resolved as soon as possible. Neither of these styles is right or wrong. There are advantages and disadvantages of each style. Probably a mix of avoiding and approaching stress is best. Choosing a response that is appropriate for the situation is the goal. Knowing how you are likely to respond to stress can help you identify the best ways to relieve and manage stress in your life.

Styles of Coping

Researchers have found that people usually fall into two basic categories of reaction to stress: Avoiders and Approachers. Both styles can help to reduce stress levels.

**Avoiders**
- Want to get away from it all
- Block out stress
- Withdraw
- Hope it will go away

**Approachers**
- Ask questions to know as much as possible
- Worry and fret
- Get upset in situations they can't control
- Work hard and drive on

Below are some advantages and disadvantages of each style.

**Avoiders**

1. Advantages
   - Many situations are resolved on their own.
   - Avoidance may work well for stressful events of short duration.

2. Disadvantages
   - Some stressful situations can't be ignored.
   - Avoiders are sometimes unprepared to deal with a major crisis.
   - Avoiders are often unaware of their physical symptoms of stress.

**Approachers**

1. Advantages
   - Taking action helps the individual feel in control.
   - Approachers may handle stress better over the long haul.
   - Approachers are usually aware of their physical symptoms of stress.

2. Disadvantages
   - Approachers may get upset and angry in difficult situations.
   - The "work hard and drive on" style can lead to burn out for the individual and people who live or work with him or her.
Stress Management Tips for:

**Avoiders**
- Meditation, reading, hobbies, taking a long walk or a hot bath are effective stress relievers for you.
- Learn to recognize your body's physical reaction to stress.
- Seek special help, counseling or a support group, during times of major crisis.

**Approachers**
- Participate in exercise that requires concentration, such as tennis, rather than walking or swimming, which allows you to replay your worries.
- Use problem-solving techniques that help you control your thoughts.

In any stressful situation, there are three alternative courses of action: Avoid, Alter, or Adapt. A goal of stress management is to use an action that is appropriate for the situation.

**Avoid**

Not all the stresses in life can be avoided, but you should recognize your options and do what you can to avoid needless stress. You may be able to decrease how often you must deal with many stress-producing situations.

**Ways to avoid stress:**

- Avoid noisy places
- Avoid hot or cold temperatures
- Avoid unnecessary changes (make a decision and stick with it)
- Avoid someone who constantly aggravates you
- Leave for work or home earlier to avoid traffic
- Walk away from a stressful situation (and come back with a clear mind)
- Avoid discussing a particular topic

**Alter**

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, maybe you can alter or change it in some way to create a more positive outcome. Altering a situation will require advance planning. Try to anticipate stress in advance and be prepared with your solution.
Ways to alter stress:

- Wear earplugs or headphones to block noise
- Dress appropriately to deal with extreme temperatures
- Alter your route to avoid traffic
- Alter your goals to be more realistic
- Set up a schedule to manage time better
- Ask someone to change their behavior or action
- Delegate authority and responsibility to others when possible
- Learn to say "no"
- Match the task to the time available to complete it
- Be sure you get accurate information
- List priorities
- Break down tasks into smaller steps
- Plan something interesting to do
- Establish routines
- Develop trusting relationships

Adapt

If you can't avoid or alter the situation, then you may need to adapt how you think, feel, or act. The change may need to come from within you. Adapting to stressful situations and learning to deal with them as best you can may be a better response than making significant changes in your life.

Ways to change your thinking:

- Forgive a mistake
- Apologize for a mistake
- Talk to yourself ("I can remain calm")
- Be less competitive with yourself and others
- Think of stress as an opportunity or challenge
- Think of the positive things in your life
- Consider if it is worth the worry (Is this worth getting upset over?)
- Consider if it will be important in the future (How important will this be in a year, five years?)
- Look at the "big picture"
- Be less of a perfectionist

Ways to change your feelings:

- Practice relaxation techniques
- Use visualization to create a positive outcome
- Exercise to reduce stress
- Laugh or sing
- Share your feelings openly
Ways to change your actions:

- Seek information
- Count to 10
- Learn new skills to reduce stress caused by lack of ability
- Slow down and do one thing at a time
- Talk to someone you trust about your problem
- Work on a hobby
- Don't make matters worse by smoking, drinking too much, or overeating
MANAGING TIME

Lack of time is often blamed for not exercising, eating poorly, and feeling stressed. Is time a stressor for you? Do you feel that your time is out of your control or controlled by outside demands? If so, you may feel greatly stressed and pressured by time demands. Time management can help you increase your efficiency and reduce unnecessary self-imposed demands. The objectives of time management are to reduce wasted time, increase time spent on enjoyable and healthful activity, achieve a balance between work, play, and self-care, and ultimately improve your sense of well-being.

Assess Your Values and Your Time

Check Yourself

Your values (what’s important to you) give direction to your life. How you spend your time says a lot about your values, priorities, and the choices you make.

Below are some important values listed in no particular order. Review the list and add any others. List the values in rank-order from “most” to “least” important with #1 being most important. For each value, rate the amount of time and effort you are currently spending in this area of your life as high (H), moderate (M), or low (L).

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<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Ranking on Importance</th>
<th>Rating for Time and Effort</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage or Other Significant Intimate Relationship</td>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>Children and Family</td>
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<td>Pleasure (Having Fun—Doing Things You Like)</td>
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<td>Physical Attractiveness / Appearance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Which values did you rate high on importance (in the top five) and high on time and effort?

Which values did you rate high on importance (in the top five) and low on time and effort?

Which values did you rate lower on importance and high on time and effort?

Should you consider using your time differently?

Understand the Concept of Balance

Balance means a lifestyle of moderation in which you divide your limited time and energy fairly among the three important life areas: work, relationships, and self-care. People can get out of balance by placing an extreme overemphasis on one or two of the life areas while neglecting the remaining area or areas.

Balance and Work

Workaholism is compulsively devoting an excessive amount of time and energy to work or other productive endeavors. It goes beyond enjoying and being very committed to your work. Do any of these characteristics sound like you? Check any that apply.

___ Lose perspective and become overly preoccupied with work
___ Work long hours and bring work home
___ Refuse to delegate, believing that you are the only one who can do the job
___ Refuse to take vacations or remain preoccupied by work during vacations
___ Have difficulty enjoying free or unstructured time
___ Deny that you have any control over the workload
___ Blame someone else for why you must work so much
___ Deny the harmful impact that your work demands place on you and your family
___ Define success as money, possessions, power, position, or exceptional professional achievement
___ Base your self-esteem on external factors (position, possessions) rather than unconditional self-acceptance from within
___ Indicate a high value on family and health but spend almost no time supporting these priorities
___ Place stress on co-workers or family members due to your level of stress
Only you can decide if your work hours and demands are excessive. If you suspect an imbalance, asking for the opinions of close friends, family members, or even co-workers can sometimes be helpful.

**Balance and Relationships**

Basic social needs are met through relationships with others and are critical to your wellbeing. Research on social support suggests that people with strong social networks practice healthier lifestyles, enjoy better health, and live longer than people who are isolated. Reaching outside yourself can give your life great meaning and joy. It takes time and energy to nurture and maintain relationships, but the rewards are worth the effort. Your self-esteem and sense of purpose in life increase when you share a common goal or bond with others.

But just like work and productivity, too much of a good thing can lead to imbalance. Some people spend so much time and energy doing for others that they neglect themselves and their work. Do any of these characteristics sound like you? Check any that apply.

___ Spend most of your time either working or nurturing others
___ Feel you must anticipate and meet all the needs of your spouse or significant other
___ Feel you must anticipate and meet all the needs of your children
___ Feel selfish or guilty if you take time for yourself
___ Encourage others to be overly dependent upon you
___ Feel resentful when the more you do the more others expect from you
___ Feel taken for granted
___ Feel unappreciated

Reaching outside all the time will leave you exhausted. Living only for yourself will leave you lonely and empty. Finding the balance is the key to a rich and contented life.

**Balance and Self-care**

Good self-care is the foundation upon which the other two priority areas are built. If you don’t take care of yourself, you won’t be able to nurture your relationships or engage in productive work. All of these areas are interrelated. Poor self-care will affect you not only in that area, but also in some or all of the other areas as well. Do any of these characteristics sound like you? Check any that apply.

___ Neglect grooming and personal hygiene
___ Abuse your health with alcohol or tobacco
___ Feel you are not worthy of self-care
___ Feel selfish if you take time for yourself
Deny your lack of self-care
Deny the negative impact of self-neglect on your health
Deny the negative impact of self-neglect on your relationships and productivity
Hold others responsible for your self-care needs

When you allow time for your own needs to balance out the time you spend doing for others and doing your job, you’ll probably be surprised at how much more you accomplish all around.

At different times in your life you may have to be out of balance temporarily due to unusual circumstances. For example, if a family member is seriously ill, you may need to devote an unusual amount of time to that person. An accountant may have to work unusually long hours during tax season. At some point, however, balance must be reestablished. If allowed to continue indefinitely, imbalance may result in significant stress symptoms. Being able to change as your circumstances change is key to balance and a healthy, satisfying life.

- Does your life currently look out of balance?
- What aspect of your life is currently over-emphasized?
- What aspect of your life is currently under-emphasized?
- What are some steps you could take to bring your life into more balance right now?

No matter how many demands or responsibilities you may have, there are ways to use your time more efficiently in all areas of your life. Good time management will benefit your physical and emotional health. Time management begins with you taking personal responsibility for how you spend your time.

**Set Priorities**

Take five to ten minutes at the beginning of each day to set priorities and make a list of what you want to accomplish that day.

Ask yourself:
- Are there tasks that are crucial for the day?
- Are there tasks that could wait?
- Are all of the tasks necessary?
- Could you break tasks down into smaller tasks that are easily and quickly accomplished?
• Could you start the next day’s list at the end of the day while projects are still fresh on your mind?
• Could you use a day planner/calendar to help schedule your time?

Mark tasks off as they are completed and feel good about your progress.

**Identify Time Wasters and Interruptions**

1. Give up some of your perfectionistic ways. Perfectionists waste a lot of time by compulsively overdoing many tasks that could require much less time for an acceptable outcome.
   • In what areas of your life could you be “average”?
   • Are you confusing high standards with unrealistic, perfectionistic standards or goals?

2. Examine your weekly log for blocks of wasted time.
   • Are so many meetings necessary and should they last so long?
   • Are you doing things that others should be doing?
   • Could you listen to professional development audiotapes while driving?
   • Do you stay calm (practice relaxation) when interruptions or delays occur?

3. Get organized. One hour spent organizing or developing a system can save many hours of wasted time down the road.
   • Could you organize your closet and drawers better?
   • Would it help to hang a key holder next to the door?
   • Could you develop a system for paying your bills?

4. Arrange your work time efficiently.
   • Do you plan difficult tasks at times when you energy is at its peak?
   • Do you know how much time a task is likely to take and match the task to the time available?
   • Do you avoid spending significant time on minor decisions?
   • Do you handle a piece of paper only once – act on it, pass it to someone else, or throw it away?
   • Do you minimize interruptions?

**Delegate and Delete**

1. **JUST SAY NO!** Probably the single most important time management skill, saying “no,” may also be the hardest for most people.
   • Can you learn to consistently protect your time by setting firm limits with other people who ask for it?
   • Can you suggest someone else to do the task?
   • Can you agree to do something but not all that was requested?
   • Can you say “no” without feeling guilty?

2. Negotiate and delegate. You’ll never know what someone else might be willing to do unless you ask.
   • Do you currently do tasks that someone else could handle?
   • Are your standards set so high that no one else could possibly meet them to your satisfaction?
• Are you comfortable asking for help?

3. Buy time with your money. Spend some of your money to pay someone else to do those mundane but time consuming services you are currently performing.
  • Could you spend less on buying things and spend more on buying time?
  • Could you pay someone else to cut the grass, wash the car, or help with housecleaning?
  • Is quality of life determined more by what you acquire or by what you do with your time?

Time management will help you free up wasted or over-committed time. Don’t use time management to find a new obligation to squeeze into your day but to ease the burden of over-commitment.

Finding Time for Physical Activity and Exercise

• Be aware of the times you are very inactive. Think about how much time you spend sitting and reclining. Plans ways to substitute lifestyle activities for sedentary activities.
• Check your luggage or stow it in a locker and walk through the terminal while waiting for a plane.
• Walk, jog, or cycle to see the sights.
• Fit in short bouts of brisk walking several times during the day.
• Discuss work issues with co-workers, your spouse, or friends while walking.
• Combine social activities with exercise – dancing, ice skating, hiking, cycling.
• Read a book or watch the news while riding a stationary cycle or walking on a treadmill.

Finding Time for Eating Healthy

• When eating out, ask for a take-home container and save a left-over portion for another meal.
• Take your breakfast with you if you are in a hurry.
• Leave the clean-up until later.
• Eat ready-to-eat cereals with fresh or frozen fruits for lunch or dinner.
• Use healthy prepackaged foods such as canned or dry soup mixes and frozen entrees you can heat in the microwave.
• Be willing to pay for conveniences that help you eat healthier, such as pre-washed and peeled vegetables.
• Use ingredients that have already been partially prepared to cut down on your preparation time.
• Prepare your own ingredients ahead of time or use pre-prepared items.
• Make a double recipe and freeze what is left in individual portion sizes for quick meals another time.
EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF HEART DISEASE

In the concern for your immediate physical needs, emotional needs can be overlooked. However, it is important to recognize and understand your emotions and to know they are normal following a heart event or any major illness. As a reaction to your heart event, you may experience feelings of withdrawal, a loss of interest in normal activities, or a sense of sadness. Recognition of your feelings is the first step through the states of coping and on to full recovery.

Stages of Coping

1. Numbness—shock, can’t believe it really happened
2. Denial—there is nothing wrong, must be a mistake
3. Anger—why me?, feelings of frustration, hostility
4. Bargaining—making a bargain with God or others to fix the problem, make promises to be a better person
5. Grieving—feel a loss to one’s self-worth, a job, independence, income, role in the family
6. Depression—the reaction to the loss / losses, feelings of sadness, weeping for no reason
7. Acceptance—coming to terms with the health issue

Treatment for depression is important. People with heart disease, who are depressed, have an increased risk of death after a heart attack, compared to those who are not depressed.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

1. Withdrawal or isolation for greater than 2 weeks
2. Neglect physical needs, unkempt appearance, staying in bed clothes
3. Prolonged feelings of worthlessness
4. Abuse of alcohol or drugs
5. Excessive moodiness
6. Problems sleeping, too much or too little
7. Hostility
Medications

Chronic depression may need to be managed by the use of antidepressants or other medications. These medications are often prescribed for short term usage and help one to identify their problems of depression and to find solutions. Antidepressants often take two to three weeks before achieving the full benefit of the medications.

Consider other ways to handle emotional situations

1. Talk with friends or family members
2. Talk with a minister
3. Exercise daily 20 – 30 minutes
4. Seek professional counseling

Please discuss your concerns of depression with your mentor or physician to help find appropriate resources.

Depression Resources

National Mental Health Association
1-800-969-6642
www.depressionscreening.org

National Institute of Mental Health
1-866-615-6464
www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/depressionmenu.cfm

Geriatric Mental Health Foundation
1-301-654-7850 ext 100
www.gmhfonline.org

Screening for Mental Health
www.mentalhealthscreening.org
SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Sexual activity is a normal part of most people’s lives. However, it is not unusual for a cardiac patient to have some anxiety or fear of resuming sexual activity, or about one’s ability to perform sexually, or a return of heart problems. You may worry about your incision, or even lose interest in sex for awhile, and that’s okay. Remember, these feelings are normal, be patient with yourself.

An index of readiness is the ability to walk up two flights of stairs or to be able to walk a city block briskly without any symptoms of pain or shortness of breath. Like with other types of physical activity, start out slowly. Communicate openly about sexuality with your partner, talk about your feelings and get in touch again. Be affectionate. Hugs and kisses are among the best forms of intimacy.

Guidelines for resuming sexual activity

Choose a familiar, pleasant setting, and a time when you are rested and relaxed, this reduces stress on the heart. Have sex with a familiar partner, a new partner may require more energy and increase anxiety. Feelings or anxiety, fatigue, depression, or even some medications can reduce your sex drive.

Wait 1 – 3 hours after eating a full meal. AVOID alcoholic beverages for at least 3 hours before having sex.

Foreplay is beneficial because it gradually prepares the heart for the increased activity of intercourse. Choose positions to avoid restricting your breathing or straining you upper arms or sternum: side by side, lying on the bottom, or sitting in a chair with your partner on top.

If you experience pain or shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, or irregular heartbeat during sex, stop and rest. If rest or medication does not relieve these symptoms, call your physician. Some patients take nitroglycerine before intercourse to prevent angina. If using Viagra or similar medications, do not take nitroglycerin for chest pain—a sudden drop may occur in your blood pressure. Call your physician or 911 if pain persists.

Talk to your physician if you need further information or have questions.
LEARNING FROM SLIP-UPS

Slip-ups are bound to happen. What happens after a slip is more important than the slip itself. You can learn from the experience and be better prepared to handle other high-risk situations in the future. Viewing slips as learning opportunities can help build self-confidence. The key is to try again, using what you have learned in new ways. Slips provide an opportunity for you to learn about skills and habits you need to work on.

Think back over a slip you have experienced related to eating, exercising, or some other habit you are trying to change. Answer these questions, then review them with your mentor.

Evaluating a Slip

1. What factors contributed to the slip? Think about *how*, *when*, and *where*, instead of *why* it happened.
   - *How?* __________________________________________________________
   - *When?* _________________________________________________________
   - *Where?* _______________________________________________________

2. What did you do or not do:
   - *Before the slip?* ______________________________________________
   - *During the slip?* ______________________________________________
   - *After the slip?* ________________________________________________

3. How well did you deal with the slip to get back on track?
   
   
   
   
   (1 = not well; 5 = very well) _____

4. What did you learn from this slip?

5. How will you handle this situation if it occurs again in the future? What will you do differently:
   - *Before the slip?* ______________________________________________
   - *During the slip?* ______________________________________________
   - *After the slip?* ________________________________________________
If you are experiencing frequent slips, you may need to re-examine your attitudes, beliefs, and skills related to changing your lifestyle. Answer these questions, then discuss any needs you may have with your mentor.

1. Are you **internally** motivated to make a lifestyle change?  Yes   No

   Internal motivation means you want to change for yourself, not because someone else says you *should* or *must*. Some people feel pressured by their family, friends, or even their doctor to make a change. These people do well as long as the pressure is on, but once it is off, they return to their old habits. They lacked internal motivation to change. We know that if you don't want to do something, you won't, and we can't make you. We can help and support, but your motivation to change must come from within you.

2. Do you realize the benefits of making the lifestyle change?  Yes   No

   What are the "pros" or advantages of making changes in your lifestyle, specifically starting to exercise, eating healthy, and managing your weight?

   a. Are these benefits still important to you?  Yes   No

   b. Are there other advantages you have come to realize for making lifestyle changes?  Yes   No

   c. What are they?

   d. What are your "cons" or barriers to making a change?

   e. What can you do now to eliminate your barriers?

We know that people who can make a long list of benefits to exercising, eating healthy, and managing their weight are more likely to be able to maintain their healthy habits over time. The more benefits you see, the more likely you are to be successful. You also identified barriers that could work against you as you try to change. In the beginning it is more important to identify and expand the benefits or advantages to making a change. Now, you can make progress by working to eliminate the barriers. Keep your list of benefits and barriers handy and in front of you. Revise your list often. Expect that some benefits which were important to you in the beginning may not be as important later. For example, you may have wanted to lose weight to be able to get into clothing you could no longer wear. When you accomplish your goal, you may find the real benefit of weight loss is the improved feelings of self-esteem and self-control.
3. Have you acquired the knowledge and skills you need to change?

It takes time to learn new skills. You may need to review some of key concepts with your mentor. These are the skills and concepts which are most important to your long-term success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>Yes, I have mastered this skill</th>
<th>No, I need to work more on this skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you selected a type of exercise you enjoy doing?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a convenient place to exercise?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have the equipment (shoes, clothing, etc.) you need to exercise?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have someone to exercise with (if that is your preference)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a specific time set aside for exercise?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how hard to exercise (your target RPE range and target heart rate range)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how long (minutes per session) and how often (times per week) to exercise?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you burn extra calories through lifestyle activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nutrition/Weight Management Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know the foods from the five food groups you should choose to eat?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know the foods from the five food groups you should decrease/avoid eating?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you make good food choices if you are hungry and need to eat between meals?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how to read a food label to know if foods are high-fat or low-fat?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how to use a fat gram booklet to determine the fat in foods when there is no food label?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you eat the proper serving size for foods you eat?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you eat less than your target number of fat grams each day?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you eat the recommended number of servings from each food group for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you make healthy purchases when shopping for food to prepare at home?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you modify recipes to reduce calories and fat?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you choose healthy foods when eating out?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Setting goals is a habit of effective and successful people. On a regular basis, they set realistic goals, develop and implement plans, monitor their progress, and make adjustments as needed. Although you can set goals, large or small, any day of the year, the New Year is an excellent time to set personal goals or resolutions.

Set Realistic Goals

You can set goals in any area of your life. Consider “where you are” (level of satisfaction) and “where you want to be” (level of importance) in various areas of your life. The gaps between “where you are” and “where you want to be” are potential needs or wants and could help you decide on a goal.

Five Steps of Goal Setting

1. What Do I Want to Have Happen?

Begin by writing on paper as many responses as possible to “What Do I Want to Have Happen?” for the goal area you have identified. Initially, your goals may be very general or long range, such as “I want to save some money” or “I want to go back to school.” Break your general goals into smaller, specific, short-term goals. For example, “I want to have enough money for a vacation in six months” or “I want to improve my computer skills.”

Consider if your goal is realistic. Many people set themselves up for disappointment because they set a goal that is unrealistic. Sometimes goals take the form of self commandments, such as “I will never --- or I will always ---.” These statements suggest you must be “perfect” – another unrealistic goal that is likely to have a disappointing outcome. A good way to evaluate whether your goal is realistic is to ask if you could expect a friend or family member, someone like you, to achieve the goal. If you can’t expect someone else to meet the goal, then it is probably unrealistic to expect it of yourself.

2. How Will I Know When I Have It?

Identify the specific, observable behaviors or criteria to determine that you have achieved your stated goal. For example, if you save $10 a week for 25 weeks you will have $250. Or, if you enroll in a computer course for one night a week, you will be on your way to achieving your goals. It is important to be able to recognize as precisely as possible when your goal has been achieved to your satisfaction.

3. What Am I Willing to Do or Give Up to Get It?

Being honest with yourself is a critical part of the goal setting process. Note that the question is “What am I willing to do --- ?” not “What should I do --- ?” to attain the goal.
In the examples above, are you willing to give up one evening a week to attend class, as well as extra time for studying, or are you willing to take your lunch to work three days a week to save money instead of eating out? If you discover that you are not actually willing to do or give up what is necessary to attain your goal, you will only be setting yourself up for disappointment at this time.

Timing, motivational readiness, and other variables impact the probability that you will succeed with your goal. If you determine that you are not ready or willing to work toward a goal, select another goal.

4. When Do I Want It to Happen?

The ideal time to begin working toward a goal is now. Thinking about and planning for the goal is part of the process. Waiting until “after the holidays” or “next Monday” is appropriate if the waiting period is necessary to prepare for the change. That’s why we suggest a quit date 30 days in advance of giving up cigarettes. In general, however, avoid procrastination as a lifestyle pattern when setting goals. It’s easy to get stuck. It is much more effective to establish goals for the week, month, six months, or one year, than to project too far in the future. Specific time limits are important measuring devices.

5. What Is Stopping Me?

Are there any potential road blocks ahead? If you know what they are, you can plan ahead for high-risk situations and avoid setbacks. Then go for it! Commit to increasing your awareness of your motivators, limitations, expectations, and fears. Share your goals with people who really care about you and want to help you. Make sure you take the advice of winners. Remember to congratulate and reward yourself for starting as well as for completing goal efforts.

The behavioral contract provided below is similar to a business agreement. There are two parties involved: you and another person who is willing to support you in your efforts to accomplish your goal. The other person may be involved to a minimal degree by only signing your contract as a witness. Or, he/she may be involved to a greater extent by helping you set your goal, develop your plan, decide upon your reward, or by even sharing in the reward with you. The degree of involvement and support you need and want is your choice.
My Personal Contract for Goal Accomplishment

My Goal (What I Want to Have Happen)

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Evidence of Accomplishment (How I Will Know When I Have It)

________________________________________________________________________________________

My Plan (What I Will Do to Accomplish My Goal)

1.) ____________________________________________

2.) ____________________________________________

3.) ____________________________________________

4.) ____________________________________________

Timeline (When I Want It to Happen)_________________________________________________________

Potential Barriers (What’s Stopping Me)

________________________________________________________________________________________

Support (Who Can Help)
I will involve (who) __________________________ in my plan as follows: __________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Rewards (How I Will Reward Myself)

________________________________________________________________________________________

Commitment
I, (your name) ____________________________ commit to working toward accomplishing this goal.

Signed: (Your Signature)_________________________ Date: ______________

Witness: ____________________________ Date: ______________
Tips for Success

- Set short-range goals that build toward your long-range goal.
- Set goals that are just out of reach, but not out of sight. By setting lower level goals – ones that are relatively easy to accomplish – it is easier to make corrections if you get off track. The achievement of step-by-step goals also builds your confidence.
- Write your goals on your calendar for the next month. Keep accurate records and review your progress.
- Believe in yourself and believe in your goals. Consider every step you make as forward movement. Remember that the first step is the hardest.

Reward Yourself for Progress

Using rewards as motivators is one of the most effective, but least used, tools in achieving goals. Learn to be comfortable giving yourself rewards as you work toward and attain your goals. You are the only one who knows what reward is meaningful to you. Recognize, reinforce, and reward yourself at each small success, no matter how trivial it may seem.

There are many easy ways that you can reward yourself. These questions may help you determine the rewards that are likely to work best for you:

- What would be a nice present to receive from a friend or family member?
- If you had an extra $10, $50, or $100, how would you spend it on yourself?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- What are your hobbies or major interests?
- Who do you like to be with?
- What makes you feel really good?
- What would you hate to lose?
- Who would you like to tell about your success?
- Who would be proud of you for achieving your goal?

Tangible Rewards

Tangible rewards have the advantage of reminding you of the goal you accomplished. Every time you see or use a reward, it will remind you of your accomplishment. Be sure that your rewards don’t negatively interfere with your lifestyle goals.

Buy yourself a gift when you reach a preset milestone. Put aside a small amount of money as you accomplish each critical task. At the appropriate time, use the money to buy or do something you would enjoy.

Intangible Rewards

Rewards must not always be tangible. As you make progress toward your goal, the best reward may be the internal satisfaction you feel from attaining the goal itself.
• Check off small goals on your “to do” list each day.
• Practice positive affirmations.
• Ask someone to give you positive feedback on a regular basis. Support from others is essential when you are attempting a goal.
• Give yourself the gift of time. Put aside 10 minutes for each day that you work toward your goal. When you have accumulated a significant block of time, spend it doing something just for you, such as browsing at a flea market or museum, building something in your workshop, or working on a community project.

Solving Problems in Goal Attainment

As problems arise in attaining your goals (and they surely will!), stop to analyze the source and substance of the problem. Ask yourself:

• What is the problem? Recognizing the problem is more than just admitting that a problem exists. 
• Who or what is involved? Be as specific as possible. Involve others in your goals, but don’t depend on them for your success or blame them for your failures. 
• How, when and where do difficulties in attaining the goal occur? Evaluate your surroundings. 
• Which aspects of your goal setting process are within your power to control and which aspects, if any, are out of your control? 
• What role do you play in making the outcome unfavorable? 
• What might occur if the goal does not turn out the way you plan? How will you feel? 

These are important questions to consider, but you should not expect to have all of the answers in how to address problems related to your goals. Experiment with various approaches. If you are experiencing a great deal of difficulty, especially when first attempting a new goal, pay attention to your emotional, physical, and behavioral responses.

Reassess Your Goals

On a regular basis, ask yourself:

• Is the goal realistic? 
• Am I following my commitments? 
• Is the goal still an important goal to me?

If you are experiencing difficulty making progress toward your goal, shift your focus from attaining the goal to simply working toward the goal or beginning the process.
Try Again

Always keep these points in mind as you move forward to try again:

- Try again as quickly as possible.
- Try again. You’re further along than when you first started.
- Try again. But, do something differently. Learn from your experiences and mistakes.
- Try again. You can do it!

Feeling Good About Yourself

How you evaluate your abilities, strengths, and weaknesses is called your self-estimate or self-esteem. Your self-esteem evolves and changes over time and is a learned behavior.

Children develop their self-esteem through the praises and criticisms of parents, teachers, and others. As an adult, you continue to evaluate yourself and develop your self-esteem. One of the primary ways you evaluate yourself is through your “self-talk” or the inner dialogues you continually have with yourself. Using positive “self-talk” or affirmations can help you feel empowered, improve your self-esteem, and help you feel more confident. Having negative thoughts about your appearance and your body can contribute to a poor self-image and low self-esteem, and sabotage your efforts to make changes in your health and lifestyle.

Here are some suggestions to help you make your self-talk more positive.

- Be aware of your negative, self-defeating thoughts. Reflect on your thoughts before, during, and after a difficult situation.
- Analyze and challenge your thoughts. Ask yourself if your thoughts are true and accurate. Are you thinking rationally or irrationally? For example, if you are tempted to overeat, ask yourself “Am I really hungry? Am I really going to feel better if I eat? Is something else bothering me?”
- Substitute more positive, helpful self-statements. For the example given above, say “I'm not really hungry. I can wait until dinner to eat. If I wait five minutes, the hunger will pass. Eating will not make me feel happy. I will take a short walk before dinner.”
- Don’t create negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Remember, you are likely to do what you think. You will take your own advice.

Practice Daily Affirmations

Affirmations are positive, motivating statements that you say to yourself regularly. For best results, say affirmations out loud to yourself at least five times while looking in the mirror. Repeat affirmations with real commitment. Write your affirmation on an index card and carry them with you. Use “I am,” “I can,” or “I will” rather than “I am not.”
statements. After repeating the affirmation, use visualizations to create a picture in your mind of the way you want to be.

Your affirmations will change as you progress through the program. For example, if you are just getting started with exercise, “I will be healthier if I am active” may be an appropriate affirmation for you. After you have been exercising regularly for more than six months, “I am very confident that I can stay active” would better match where you are in the process of change.

Practice affirmation for at least one month and evaluate the results.

- Are affirmations helping you achieve your goals?
- Are affirmations helping you feel better about yourself?

**Build a Better Body Image**

Most people are constantly observing and evaluating themselves. They draw conclusions about who they are and attach labels to themselves. Often the labels are related to appearance and determine “body image.” Body image is the way you see yourself in your mind’s eye. What labels do you give yourself related to your appearance and your body?

If you find that you have a poor body image, you may need to work to develop more positive attitudes about the way you look. Your poor body image may be sabotaging your efforts to make positive changes to your lifestyle. For example, if you label yourself as uncoordinated and un-athletic, you will resist physical activity. If you label yourself as overweight and unattractive, you will feel depressed and support that belief by overeating. You may resist wearing stylish clothes that fit you nicely.

Building a positive body image is a very important part of lifestyle management, especially weight management. Some people who are overweight focus on the time when they will be thin. Focus on the present. Don’t wait until you have lost weight to start feeling good about yourself and enjoying yourself. It may be unrealistic for you to be as thin as you desire. But, you can lose weight, attain your healthier weight goal, and improve your health. If you like and care about yourself, you will be more likely to follow your meal plans, stay active, and manage your stress.

**Tips for Building a Better Body Image**

- Think of yourself as an attractive person. Get a flattering haircut, manicure, or facial to reinforce your attractive self-image.
- Buy stylish clothes that fit you comfortably. Baggy clothes won’t cover up your weight problem and clothes that fit too tightly won’t motivate you to lose weight. You deserve to look nice.
- Focus on your strengths every day. Build new strengths. Remind yourself of your accomplishments with positive self-talk and affirmations.
- Be nice to yourself. Do things you enjoy. As you start to make positive changes, try new activities you always told yourself you couldn’t do before. Take dancing lessons, learn to play tennis, or go snow skiing.
- Treat yourself like a beloved friend. Imagine a very special guest is visiting your home. How would you treat this person? You are just as important. There is no one else as important or deserving as you.
- Try to be more outgoing in social situations. Learn to feel comfortable talking with others and sharing information about yourself. Learn to listen for and accept compliments.
- Give yourself time to see the “new you.” Your body image may not immediately reflect the new, active, thinner, healthier you. You may not see yourself as others see you. It will take time to realize that you have really changed.
- Keep your body image accurate and current as you become active and lose weight. Look in mirrors or catch your reflection in windows. Take photos of yourself as you slim down. Try on clothes in new, smaller sizes. Take your measurements.

**Learn Ways to Feel More Confident**

Your level of confidence about your ability to manage a certain situation is a very strong predictor of how likely you are to be able to do it. It is even a better predictor than how you have acted in the past. If you think you can act in a positive way, then it is likely that you will. If you think you can’t, then you will need to try to change your attitudes to increase your self-efficacy.

**Tips for Building Self-Confidence**

- **Fulfill your needs first.** Are you using the excuse of having to care for others to neglect yourself?
- **Recognize your own true worth as a person.** You are a truly unique and special individual.
- **Know and accept yourself.** Learn to understand why you think, feel, and behave as you do. Learn to love and accept yourself and take responsibility for your actions.
- **You are not what you do.** Your actions may be wise or unwise, but that doesn’t mean you are a “good” or “bad” person.
- **Become self-reliant.** Self-reliance means you believe you can handle things and be successful. Set goals and make plans that are not dependent on others’ moods or actions.
- **Give up trying to solve other people’s problems,** make them happy, or save them from the consequences of their behaviors.
• **Embrace change.** Everything and everyone is going to change, so don’t fight it. Be willing to give up things the way they are to have them the way they can be. Learn to live with change and enjoy it. Look for opportunities to change for the better.

• **Give yourself a pep talk.** Practice positive thinking and affirmations. Tell yourself “I can do it!” and you will.

• **Keep company with positive people.** Negative people sap your energy and creativity with their putdowns, complaints, and self-defeating thoughts. Seek out people who can inspire and support you to reach your maximum potential.

• **Reward yourself.** When you do something right or well, compliment yourself or give yourself a reward. Keep a list of your accomplishments and review them frequently.

• **Stand tall and smile.** Your body language communicates a great deal about how confident you feel. People who feel good about themselves hold their bodies erect with their heads up and smile. A smile is the most telling sign of approachability and warmth.

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**Getting the Support You Need**

Having a strong social support system buffers the impact of everyday stresses and provides others to whom you can turn in times of need. The overall function of social support is to enhance the well-being of the person receiving the support. People who are supported are more mentally and physically healthy than people who are isolated and without supportive relationships. For example, studies have shown that happily married people generally have fewer illnesses and lower mortality rates than single (divorced, widowed, never-married) people do. And, unhappily married people have been found to have even poorer health than singles.

Achieving goals in any type of endeavor is always enhanced by support from others. Behind every successful person is generally at least one supporter. A parent, spouse, teacher, boss, coach, or friend can be a powerful asset in goal attainment.

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**Types of Social Support**

There are numerous types of social support. The following types of support can be provided by almost anyone:

**Affection and emotional support**

“I love you.” “I care about you.” “You are important to me.” “I’m on your side.” Emotional support may be offered even if the person giving the support is not in total agreement with the person receiving the support. This type of support comes from
people who can share the joys of success as well as the pain and frustrations of challenges.

**Appraisal support**

“You did a good job.” “You played a good game.” “You tried hard.” This type of support is usually related to performance of a specific task. Supporters can also challenge and question the person in an emotionally supportive way. “Did you do your best to achieve your goals?” “What could you do differently to overcome an obstacle?”

**Information support**

“I would advise you to____.” “Facts show that____.” “There are risks associated with ________.” It is important to have people to go to as good sources of reliable and valid information.

**Empathy**

“I know how you feel.” “I feel the same as you.” People who share similar experiences, priorities, values, and views can provide a way to check perceptions and perspectives in a social context. “You’re right about that.”

**Sustaining support**

“Don’t give up now.” “You can do it.” Having a supporter who is there to encourage and motivate over the long-term is important.

**Listening**

“I hear what you are saying.” Listening support means hearing what is said without giving advice or making judgments.

**Technical appreciation**

“I know it isn’t easy to lose weight.” “Giving up cigarettes will be difficult for you.” “I know that change is not easy.” “Here’s what you can expect.” Having technical knowledge about a task or topic makes this type of support special and different from the support of a person who is less knowledgeable. The technical information provided is trusted.

**Technical challenge**

“What will you do this week to eat less fat?” “What kept you from exercising last week?” “Are you ready to try a little jogging along with your walking?” This type of support keeps you from becoming stale or complacent and challenges your way of thinking. It stretches, encourages, and leads you to greater creativity, excitement, and involvement. Holding you accountable for your actions is a reason for technical challenge. This type
of support is provided by individuals who know as much or more about the task or topic as the person receiving support.

Support Systems

Think about the goals you have achieved in the past – playing a sport, getting through school, getting a job, or adjusting to a loss or major life change. Who supported you? What type of support did he/she provide? Everyone needs support from others. It is important for you to decide the type of support you need and want at this time and who you want to support you. Focus on types of support where a gap exists between what you need and what you currently receive or where the quality of support is unsatisfactory. While there are advantages to having more than one source of support (in case someone is unavailable to you), most people find that the quality of the support is often more important than the quantity of support. Once you have identified the type or types of support you need and want, consider who can provide it. Not everyone is capable of providing support. Even close friends, relatives, and associates may, in fact, be unsupportive.

Asking for Support

Once you know the type of support you want and who might provide it, it is your responsibility to specifically and directly ask for it. Don’t expect others to read your mind or know what you need. Identifying and communicating the types of support needed avoids “hurtful” behaviors from others that may have been intended to be “helpful.” As you achieve your health and fitness goals and maintain your healthy lifestyle, you can serve as a role model and supporter to others.

Tips for Broadening Your Social Support System

These tips will help you broaden your social support system in general.

- Call, write letters, and send e-mails to long-distance friends you have known for a long time.
- Keep in close touch with extended family members who live far away.
- Join a church or synagogue and get involved.
- Be a good neighbor. Plan social activities. Offer to help out.
- Don’t sit back and wait for others to call. Call them first.
- Be a good listener. Ask “Do you want some advice, or just a good listener?”
- Confide in others and let them get to know the real you.
- Be an interesting person to know. Talk about something other than your work or children.
- Develop a genuine interest in others. Ask questions of others.
- Get a pet. Pets provide companionship and a feeling of safety.
- Become a volunteer. You’ll be less preoccupied with your own problems.
- Join organizations, clubs, and groups who have similar interests to your own.
• Develop reciprocal relationships. Be a “taker” and a “giver.”

**Understand Co-Dependency**

A co-dependent is someone whose mission is to cure or “fix” someone he or she loves. In reality, the helper sometimes becomes part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Rather than providing genuinely helpful support to the person, the codependent goes beyond simply caring to become involved in such counter productive acts as monitoring, surveillance, and nagging. In an effort to solve the other person’s problems, the co-dependent becomes controlling of the other’s behavior. When these misguided efforts to help fail, co-dependents may become critical, blaming, and punishing of the person who needs help.

Co-dependent relationships frequently develop around health-related behaviors. Whether the behavior is smoking, overeating, alcohol use, or physical inactivity, co-dependent relationships are stressful for both parties. As one person is attempting to make significant changes, the other may initially feel threatened and uncertain. Adapting to the “new person” can be difficult. In extreme cases, there may even be instances of sabotaging progress so old familiar patterns can re-emerge. If this can be recognized for what it is – a fear of change – then positive communication can take place. If you suspect that you might be involved in a co-dependent or unhealthy relationship, you should seek professional help from a qualified professional.

**Tips for the Helper**

- Let go of the need to control others’ behaviors.
- Try to care about the person’s problem without taking on the job of “fixing” him or her.
- Offer support in general. Say “How can I help?”
- Put the responsibility for solving the problem back where it belongs.
- Communicate that any changes must be made for and by the individual alone.

**Tips for the Person Needing Help**

- Accept your responsibility for your health and well-being.
- Don’t blame others for your lack of progress.
- Don’t make excuses for your behaviors. It keeps you focused on obstacles rather than solutions.
- Point out to any well-meaning but misguided people that although you may appreciate their (inappropriate) efforts to help you, their particular approach is not what you really need. Then help clarify what type of help and support you really want, if any.
- Communicate assertively to express your needs.
- Set limits and defend your boundaries against intrusions by others.
Communicating Assertively

Poor communication is often the reason people don’t get along with each other. Would any of these situations be stressful for you?

- Giving corrective feedback to someone who is doing a poor job
- Responding to someone who has lost his/her temper
- Saying “no” to high-pressure tactics of people selling things
- Asking someone for help or a favor
- Asking someone to change his or her behavior when it affected you

Assertive communication shows respect for the rights of others as well as yourself in troublesome situations such as those listed above. Assertive behavior communicates feelings, beliefs, and needs directly and clearly, while non-assertive and aggressive behaviors are indirect forms of communication. Communicating assertively can boost your self-esteem, enhance your coping skills, and help you maintain control of your life.

In any communication, you will play one of two roles: the sender or the receiver. Each role requires important skills. Good sending skills together with good receiving skills will enable you to communicate more effectively.

The Sender

When you want to communicate something to another person, you must decide on your message. Messages are derived from your thoughts and feelings. The first step in the development of the message is to determine what you are thinking and feeling. The next step is to communicate your message to the receiver in a direct and honest fashion. The figures below illustrate how messages travel from the sender to the receiver.

Unfortunately, not all messages are received as intended. Something can happen between the “true thoughts and feelings” and the “true message” to distort the message. Distorted messages can be caused by inaccurate or negative thoughts, hasty reactions, and fear of the receiver’s reaction. If the message becomes distorted, it can lead to misunderstandings, unmet needs, resentment, and stress.
Before You Speak

You can learn to minimize distortion in your messages and reduce the stress between you and the receiver. Before you speak, screen your communication by checking yourself on these points:

Content – What are you thinking and feeling?

Clarity – Is the wording as simple as you can make it without losing the meaning? Does the language fit the receiver?

Conciseness – Are you saying more than is necessary? Is it possible that parts of the message could confuse or distract the receiver and cause him/her to not hear your main point?

Importance – How well can you convey that the message is critical, either to you or to the receiver?

As the sender, you should assess the receiver’s understanding of and reaction to your message. If you believe the message was understood as you intended, the communication can continue to its logical conclusion. However, if you believe the message was not appropriately understood or there was an inappropriate reaction, then your message should be modified. Continue to restate your message until you believe the receiver has truly understood your message the way you want.

The Receiver

Listening is the role of the receiver and the other half of communication. Making a sincere effort to understand what the sender is communicating is essential to personal interaction. Here are four techniques that will show you are a good listener:

1. Restating and Highlighting

You can show that you are listening carefully if you restate or highlight what was just said. Paraphrase in your own words instead of “parroting” the message. You are not agreeing or disagreeing, but simply feeding back what you have understood. This technique allows the sender to assess whether or not the message effectively communicated his or her thoughts.

2. Clarifying

If the message was not clear to you, say “I need you to clarify what you have just said” or “I am not sure that I fully understand what you are saying.” These statements focus on the message rather than the speaker.

3. Reflecting Feelings

Let the speaker know you understood his or her feelings as well as thoughts. You can show you recognize feelings by noting the
sender’s actual words (happy, angry, sad) and non-verbal messages (facial expressions, tone of voice, posture). Try to think of what you would be feeling if you were in the speaker’s shoes. Say, “You look like you are feeling puzzled” or “It sounds like you are feeling angry.”

4. Summarizing

Summarizing main ideas and feelings is appropriate after a prolonged discussion. This technique is especially helpful in discussions of differences of opinions, conflicts, or complaints. It is also effective in groups where discussions on a given issue can be complicated or confusing. Say, “What you have said so far is ________” or “To recap what has been said, ______________.”

There are three types of communication styles:

1. Non-Assertive
2. Aggressive
3. Assertive

Learn to Communicate Assertively

Your goal to communicate without distortion will be easier if you send assertive messages that are direct, open, and honest. Assertive communication begins with “I _____” statements. Non-assertive and aggressive communications typically begin with “You ____” statements (blaming statements).

A. Basic Methods for Assertive Communication

There are three basic methods for communicating assertively:

1. Use “I want” Statements

These statements help you clarify for yourself and others what you really desire. Using “I want” statements allows you to openly problem solve and negotiate if there is a conflict between your wants and the other person’s wants. Sometimes, however, “I want” statements are misinterpreted as non-negotiable demands. You can prevent these misunderstandings if you ask the person about his or her preferences or willingness to do what you want. Say “I would like you to ________.
Would this be possible?”
2. Use “I feel” Statements

These statements express your specific feelings or emotions regarding the other person’s behavior or situation without attacking him/her as a person. When you use “I feel” statements, you clarify for yourself and others exactly what and how you feel. (Remember, people cannot read your mind!) You also provide information others can use to make decisions about their own behaviors. When expressing your feelings, avoid always using one feeling statement (“I feel upset” or “I feel good”). This habit might keep you from discovering your true feelings.

3. Use “I understand” Statements

These statements are useful when you want to express your sensitivity to the other person or his/her situation. This type of statement is especially useful if you’re concerned that the other person may misunderstand your assertiveness. First, show recognition of the other person’s situation, feelings, wants, or beliefs, then describe your situation, feelings, wants, or beliefs. Use “and” or “and yet,” rather than “but” to bridge the two statements to position both parts as equally important.

B. Common Difficult Situations

In general, people tend to have difficulty being assertive in four types of situations:

1. Refusing requests (saying “no”)
2. Making requests for help or assistance
3. Expressing positive feelings about another person or an event
4. Expressing negative feelings about another person or an event

1. Refusing Requests

It is not always possible to meet every request that is made of you. When you must say “no,” it does not mean you are rejecting the person or that you don’t care about him or her. Saying “no” also doesn’t mean the person will never ask you again. Learning to refuse requests in an assertive way has numerous advantages:

- It means you are protecting your rights and interests.
- It allows you to spend your time and energy on activities and people of your choice.
- It benefits others indirectly because you are less likely to feel irritated and later subject them to feelings of resentment.
- It helps you feel in control by setting limits for yourself.
- It frees you from feeling guilty.

Tips for Refusing Requests

- Don’t try to talk the person out of making the request.
- Be direct and honest instead of making excuses.
- Say “thank you,” if appropriate.
Here are some ways to say “no” when confronted with requests related to your lifestyle habits. Write other assertive responses that you have used in the past.

a) Use “I want” Statements

- “No, I want to go to the gym instead of going to the sports bar.”
- “No, I don’t want to eat at that restaurant because there are few healthy choices.”
- “No, I don’t want to smoke.”
- “No, I want a diet soda instead of a beer.”

b) Use “I feel” Statements

- “No, I wouldn’t feel comfortable missing my time for exercise.”
- “No, I’m worried about overeating.”
- “No, I’d feel better if I exercised instead of watching TV.”

c) Use “I understand” Statements

- “I understand that you need me to run an errand for you, and yet I don’t want to miss my exercise time.”
- “I understand that you are in a bind, and yet I want to spend time with my family.”
- “I appreciate that your mother made the cake, and yet I don’t want the extra calories.”

Accept With Conditions

“I can’t work late on Monday, but I can work until 6:00 pm on Wednesday.”
“No, I can’t take care of your dog, but I can recommend another resource.”
“No, I can’t give a speech at the luncheon, but I can suggest another speaker.”

Express Mixed Feelings

- “Part of me would like to eat the cake, but the other part of me knows I should follow my meal plan, so I must decline your offer for cake.”
- “I’d like to visit with you, but I can’t do it now. Let’s set another time to talk.”

2. Making Requests for Assistance or Help

Everyone needs extra assistance or help from time to time. Even if you feel you are the best one to do the job, there are advantages to asking others for help.

- You are less likely to become overburdened and stressed.
- You don’t feel exploited and unappreciated.
• You may be able to use your time more efficiently and effectively.
• You are practicing good self-care.
• Others have an opportunity to develop skills and demonstrate capabilities.

Tips for Asking for Assistance or Help

• Don’t wait until you are desperate to ask for help.
• Be direct.
• Give clear, specific information that will help others decide whether to say “yes” or “no.”
• Let the other person know it is OK to say “no.”
• Give the other person an opportunity to ask questions about the request.
• Allow people time to decide on an answer. If you put them “on the spot,” the answer is more likely to be “no.”

3. Expressing Positive Feelings

Everyone needs positive feedback. There are many advantages to expressing positive feelings.

• It makes the other person feel good about himself or herself, which promotes self-confidence and self-esteem.
• It reinforces positive behaviors.
• It increases the likelihood that someone will act in ways you want.
• It brings you closer to others.
• In personal relationships, it promotes intimacy.
• It is easier to give criticism or express annoyance if you have freely and sincerely expressed positive feelings toward a person in the past.

Tips for Expressing Positive Feelings

• Be specific.
• Give small compliments more frequently rather than saving them for one major expression.
• Don’t always combine praise with a request.
• Don’t limit praise to times when you are also giving criticism.
• Consider what the person wants to hear.
• Be aware that well-meant compliments can be misunderstood.

4. Expressing Annoyance and Anger

Annoyance and anger are normal emotions that everyone feels from time to time, but they can be destructive if they are expressed aggressively. In fact, people who frequently feel angry and hostile and act aggressively (called “hot reactors”) may be at greater risk for coronary heart disease and other stress-related illnesses.
Test Your Temper – How Often Are You Angry?

Rate how closely each statement describes your style of anger. Total your points.

3 = Definitely like me
2 = Somewhat like me
1 = Not like me

_____ It doesn’t take much to make you mad.
_____ People often tell you to calm down.
_____ You blow up at bad drivers.
_____ You get furious if you are treated poorly at restaurants or stores.
_____ Other people’s mistakes can upset you for the whole day.
_____ When you get mad, you blame others.
_____ You swear loudly to blow off steam.
_____ You feel like hitting someone who makes you really angry.
_____ You’ve been told by others that you have a bad temper.
_____ You’ve been known to throw or break things when you are frustrated or angry.

_____ Total Points

Interpretation:

- If your score is 10, you seem to have a high temper threshold and to stay calm in situations that would frustrate others.
- If your score is 11 to 16, you get angry about as often as most people. Try to express your anger by following the tips below.
- If you score 17 to 22, you may be under too much stress, or getting angry may be a habit. Take this score seriously and begin to make changes before it affects your health.
- If you score 23 or higher, and you continue your attitudes and behaviors, you could risk serious health and personal consequences. It may help to speak to a counselor about ways to manage your anger.

The person with a non-assertive communication style expresses anger by withdrawing emotionally and giving the “silent treatment.” He or she may deny the anger, but show it in another way. This behavior is called passive-aggressive and it can also be very stressful for the person and others.

Learning to express anger in an assertive way has these advantages:

- It lets others know what you are feeling and thinking (where you are “coming from”).
- It shows you are willing to listen to the other person’s point of view.
• It shows you are trying to reach an understanding or solve the problem.
• It shows you are willing to take a risk or negotiate.
• It demonstrates self-control.

Tips for Expressing Annoyance and Anger Assertively

• Consider the timing. “Counting to 10” or higher, may have merit.
• Consider the setting. Some matters are best discussed in private.
• Consider the degree of anger you express. Fewer words are usually better.
• Confront the behavior, not the person.
• Role-play or practice the communication before you deliver the message.
• Describe the specific behavior first, then express your feelings to prevent the other person from getting defensive.
• Take into account the other person’s views in your statement.
• Clarify your assertive response with a reason to support it.
• Reassert or restate using different words or reasons, if necessary.
• Propose a solution, if appropriate, or negotiate a compromise solution.
• Encourage an assertive response from the other person. If the other person is nonassertive, encourage him/her to express feelings, wants, and frustrations.

Here are some ways to express annoyance or anger in situations related to your lifestyle habits. Write other assertive responses that you have used in the past.

a) Use “I want” Statements

“I very much want to get my walk in before supper, even if it is a little shorter than usual.”
“I really don’t want to eat any more.”
“I won’t take on any more tasks until I finish this report.”

b) Use “I feel” Statements

“When you continue to bring high fat snacks into the house, I feel angry.”
“When you don’t recognize my efforts to lose weight, I feel hurt.”
“When you smoke in front of me when you know I am trying to quit, I feel mad.”

c) Use “I understand” Statements

“I understand that you are not interested in exercising, and yet it is important to me to walk every day, so I will exercise alone.”
“I realize others are working overtime today, and yet I can’t without appropriate notice.”
“I appreciate that you prepared the cake for my birthday, and I will eat only a small bite to stay on my meal plan.”
d) Express Mixed Feelings

“I feel annoyed and I also feel disappointed that you won’t go for a walk with me as planned.”
“I feel mad and I also feel hurt that you won’t watch the kids so I can have some time for myself.”
“I feel frustrated and I also feel sad when you don’t notice that I’ve lost weight.”

Practicing Assertive Communication

There are several ways to practice acting assertively before engaging in an actual conversation. You might ask a friend to role play the situation with you. If your friend is a good actor, this experience can be very realistic and quite helpful. Another way is to use a tape recorder (a video is even better) and act out your part of the conversation while imagining how the other person will respond. Also, you may want to try making your assertive statement in front of a mirror. The mirror and recorder will provide feedback not only about what you said but how you said it.

Tips for Practicing Assertive Communication

• Think about your goal and purpose. What do you want the other person to know?
• Imagine yourself assertively handling the situation.
• Ask someone to role play non-assertive, aggressive, and assertive behaviors.
• Practice two or three times, then consider changes you would like to make and practice again until you feel comfortable.
• Evaluate your own assertiveness, not the other person’s behavior, as a measure of your success. Some people will behave non-assertively or aggressively no matter what you do.

Other Types of Communication

In today’s world of technology, there are new methods of sending and receiving messages, such as e-mail and voice mail, in addition to traditional written communications, such as letters, memos, and reports.

Tips for Written Communication

• Read all messages carefully, especially e-mail, before they are sent.
• Analyze the “tone” of the words you write and how your message will “sound” to the receiver.
• Use simple, direct, and clear language that is appropriate for the receiver. There is no advantage to trying to impress others with your knowledge or vocabulary.
• Remember that written communication provides a permanent record of your message. If it is harsh or hurtful, its damage could be long lasting.
Assessing Body Language

Also, be aware that you send non-verbal messages. Facial expressions, posture, and other physical gestures and movements, called “body language,” say a great deal about how you feel about yourself, others, and the message you are sending or receiving. Pay attention to the non-verbal messages you send to and receive from others.

- Non-assertive body language conveys weakness, anxiety, and lack of self-confidence. It softens the impact of what is being said to the point that the message loses most of its power.
- Aggressive body language conveys an exaggerated sense of self-importance, overbearing, strength, and/or an air of superiority.
- Assertive body language matches what is being said verbally. It adds strength to what is being said and is generally self-assured.