

Handling Stress

What to watch for in yourself:

- ❖ Am I tense (especially in the neck and shoulders)?
- ❖ Do I hold my breath, or breathe from the chest?
- ❖ Am I eating when I am not hungry or skipping too many meals?
- ❖ Am I getting angry and impatient with people, especially at home?
- ❖ Do I feel like crying about things that never affected me before?
- ❖ Do I expect the worst, or feel like just giving up?
- ❖ Am I smoking (or smoking more), or drinking “to unwind”?
- ❖ Do I have a drink or use OTC meds to help me sleep?
- ❖ Do I need a couple of caffeinated drinks to get started each day?
- ❖ Do I feel suspicious of the people around me?

What can I do to help myself?:

- ❖ Take assigned breaks away from your job duties (do not eat at your desk)
- ❖ Avoid snacking out of boredom or depression—find physical alternatives
- ❖ Walk around somewhere secure/safe several times during the shift to clear your head
- ❖ Take 5-15 minute breaks to read or listen to calming music away from your regular chores
- ❖ Learn what you have control over (your reaction to things) and what you don’t (the hours your shift runs); change or adapt what you control, learn coping skills for what you don’t control
- ❖ Be aware of your personal communication (how you talk to people, who you talk to, how what you say is interpreted.) Ask for feedback from someone you trust on this.
- ❖ Stick to a sleep schedule—if you work nights, sleep at the same time every day, and instruct your family and friends NOT to infringe on this.
- ❖ Drink water and avoid drinks with sugar or high amounts of caffeine in them. Water hydrates and will help you under stress, sugar, tobacco and alcohol exacerbates the stress reaction.
- ❖ If you need more (or less) challenging tasks at work, advocate on your own behalf.
- ❖ Get regular health, dental, and vision check-ups. Many stress-related health problems can be identified early and addressed this way.

What can the organization do to reduce stress?:

- ❖ Supervisors and management have to enforce contract clauses (such as allowing officers breaks out of the squad and out of the public eye)
- ❖ Supervisors need to be aware that an employee’s negative behaviors are often a stress reaction
- ❖ Burnout is caused by chronic occupational stress, not “bad” employees
- ❖ Require personal communication training for the staff (good communication is as common as common sense...)
- ❖ Understand biological factors at play; the body is not designed to sit for long periods of time, computer screens do cause eye strain and can cause permanent vision problems, biologically the body is designed to be “asleep” from 3-5 a.m., and also from 3-5 p.m.