

Managing Stress and Anger

by

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Stress is a common physical reaction to the multiple frustrations and pressures of daily life. Anger is often the emotional expression of that stress. How your body reacts to physical and emotional stress is very similar to aging, according to Deepak Chopra in his classic book, Ageless Body, Timeless Mind.

Like your ancestors, your reaction to stressful situations is to help you survive in a sometimes hostile environment, by creating a heightened mental awareness and flooding your muscles with energy-producing chemicals. However, if stress is activated too often or for prolonged periods of time, the stress response can cause damage to your immune system and your body and its vital organs.

- **Immune System:** Stress weakens your immune system by reducing your body's ability to resist disease, viruses and bacterial infections. In addition, your capability to recover from sickness or injuries is prolonged or compromised by constant stress.
- **Circulatory System:** Elevated blood pressure and heart rate will damage the elasticity of blood vessels, and ultimately—your heart.
- **Intestines:** Continual decreases in blood flow can leave the mucous lining vulnerable to ulcers and gastrointestinal problems.
- **Brain:** Excessive cortisol is toxic to brain cells and may damage the cognitive ability. The most common reaction is anger, fatigue, and depression.



When you are faced with stress on a daily basis, the result is increased emotions of anger. One of the universal triggers of "anger" as described in Emotions Revealed by Dr. Paul Ekman, is called "interference." Which means that you are "restrained or inhibited" in some way:

- Stuck in a traffic jam.
- Diagnosed with an illness.
- Not being able to say what's on your mind.
- Rising taxes and healthcare.
- Feeling the tug-of-war between work and home responsibilities.
- Experiencing computer crashes, cell phone failures, etc.

The increased emotions of anger and the fallout are becoming an increasingly common part of the business landscape. A 1998 survey by Inc. Magazine, posed a question to 10,000 American workers: "What is your most common emotional reaction at work?" Seventy-eight percent (78%) said, "Anger."

The important question to ask yourself is this: *If stress is physically and emotionally damaging and "anger" is the most common emotion expressed at work, what can I do to help manage my stress and anger?* You can invest in yourself by focusing on these seven *Self-care Fundamentals* of stress prevention:

- **Nutrition:** Eating properly is essential to good health. The appropriate diet for each of us will vary to some degree. Paying attention to sustaining a balanced diet will improve your immune system and increase your resistance to disease, viruses, and bacteria.
- **Water:** Our body needs to be flushed constantly to remove toxins and replenish energy. Trying to drink eight glasses of water per day will help keep your body properly hydrated and your organs functioning at peak efficiency.
- **Air:** Taking in deep breaths brings oxygen to your whole cellular structure. Deep, measured breathing helps to relax muscles, tendons and ligaments made rigid by stress chemicals, restoring blood circulation and oxygen to your vital organs for normal usage. Many forms of meditation focus on the "breath" and it has been shown to reduce physical, emotional and mental stress.
- **Sunshine/Light:** The value of adequate lighting and sunlight has been found by researchers to be fundamental to your psychological well-being. Sunshine can improve your attitude and your resilience. In addition, sunlight is the only way for your body to create Vitamin D naturally. It only requires 10 minutes in the sun per week without sun block to get your Vitamin D needs met.
- **Exercise:** A regular program of exercise helps sustain physical energy; reduce physical, mental and emotional stress; improve flexibility; and decrease bone and soft tissue injury. As life expectancy increases, regular exercise can make the difference in your quality of life as you age and become elderly.
- **Balance:** Keeping an appropriate balance of those things which are important in your life can renew your sense of well-being. Attitude is critical to emotional hardiness; your attitude is the control center of your life.
- **Focus:** It is essential to have personal goals. The ability to accomplish your objectives provides you with a sense of accomplishment and reinforces your attitude of well-being. Nothing creates a zest for life like having something to look forward to.

In addition, stress and anger in the workplace cost businesses millions of dollars in terms of loss productivity due to interpersonal disputes, absenteeism, illness, turnover, lawsuits, and more. So the question becomes more than "what can I do" to "what can we do."

Businesses can do more than offer an Employee Assistance Program or Health Care Benefits. They can critically examine their role in creating more collaborative work environments and to recognize that the "satisfaction" of their workforce is their responsibility. The return on investment for the business is higher levels of job satisfaction, increased productivity, and a commitment to the goals and aspirations of their work community.