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How Does Stress Affect Us?

The subject of stress has become a favorite subject of everyday conversation. It is not unusual to hear ourselves talk with friends, coworkers, and family members about the difficulty we have with managing the stress of everyday living. We talk about being burned out, overwhelmed and "losing it." We also hear and talk about our efforts to control the events that cause stress, and most of us understand the results of not controlling our reactions to stress.

Yes, we know that stress may cause heart disease. But most of us are unaware of the many other emotional, cognitive and physical consequences of unmanaged stress.

- Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress.
- 75 to 90 percent of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
- Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death--heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has declared stress a hazard of the workplace.

Stress is expensive. We all pay a stress tax whether we know it or not. Currently, health care costs account for approximately 8% or \$6.2 billion of total health care bills, according to HERO's Modifiable Health Risky Study (October 2000). And one in four people in a 2004 poll say they've taken a "mental health day" as a result of work stress.

While stress plays havoc with our health, productivity, pocketbooks, and lives, stress is necessary, even desirable. Exciting or challenging events such as the birth of a child, completion of a major project at work, or moving to a new city generate as much stress as does tragedy or disaster. And without it, life would be dull.

Adapted from The Stress Solution by Lyle H. Miller, Ph.D., and Alma Dell Smith, Ph.D.