

STRESS AND PAIN



Stress accelerates the pain system

A “stressor” is any event or circumstances that triggers a physical stress response. Pain itself is a potential stressor, and a perception of pain as threatening or frightening may evoke an increased physical stress response, thereby accelerating pain perception. In addition, to pain, other life stressors can increase the physical stress response—such as increased heart rate, blood pressure and release of stress hormones—which can increase body inflammation and activation of pain fibers. While stress may not be cause of pain, it can increase its intensity and duration.

Below are some important strategies for reducing the triggering of the physical stress response.

- 1) Exercise 30 minutes a day. Find what works for you. Exercise improves the health of the body.
- 2) Focus your energy on what you can control. Try not to brood about things out of your control.
- 3) Engage in daily activities that are relaxing and meaningful. This can protect you against the physical effects of challenging situations.
- 4) Try to avoid unhelpful thoughts, such as remorse over past events that have already occurred or worry about events that have not occurred yet.
- 5) Pay attention every day to aspects of your life that you are grateful for.
- 6) Find individuals who are supportive and good listeners—take turns venting and sharing the challenges of life.
- 7) Set daily goals that directly improve your quality of life and sense of purpose. This can protect you against the random frustrations and emotionally painful experiences of life.
- 8) Pay attention to the important and meaningful aspects of the present moment—try not to miss that best features of each moment.
- 9) Take time to breathe in and out, to deepen your breathe, to let the tension go, to pause, and feel your emotional strength.
- 10) Be kind to yourself, realize that everyone misses the mark at times, and make a commitment to self-care.