

well. It often affects the digestive system, causing countless gastrointestinal problems (e.g., stomach-ache, diarrhea, and irritable bowel syndrome). Re-

and changing as circumstances demand and learning to *listen*. Listen to our bodies, our feelings, and our relationships and be *aware* of the common signs of stress. See Table 10-1.

TABLE 10-1

Stress Warning Signals

Check the signs of stress that you have experienced in the last month. Stress affects many dimensions of your life.

Physical

- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal (constipation and/or diarrhea, indigestion, stomach cramping or bloating, nausea or vomiting)
- Acne or fever blister flare-up
- Frequent colds, flu, low-grade infections/herpes flare-ups
- Chest pain
- Increased perspiration (excess sweating, cold or sweaty hands)
- Allergy flare-up, asthma attack, rashes, hives
- Muscle twitches or eye twitches
- Heart pounding, racing, or beating erratically
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Tight or stiff neck/shoulders
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia, sleeping too much, sleeping too little)
- Weight gain or loss

Emotional/Behavioral

- Depression
- Unhappiness for no reason
- Easily upset
- Feeling burned out or overwhelmed
- Edginess, ready to explode
- Questioning your personal worth
- Feeling sensitive to criticism
- Bossiness
- Crying
- Irritability, nervousness, anxiousness
- Increased smoking
- Eating more or lack of appetite
- Mood swings
- Feeling powerless to change things
- Paying less attention to appearance
- Being accident-prone
- Impulsive actions
- Bouts of anger/hostility
- Social withdrawal or need to be with people most or all of the time
- Trouble getting along with others
- Increased drinking (or drug use)

Cognitive

- Disorganization (losing things, making dumb mistakes)
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Difficulty making decisions
- Lack of creativity
- Constant worry
- Forgetfulness (memory problems)
- Negative attitude and/or negative self-talk
- Lethargy
- Inability to get things done
- Loss of sense of humor
- Thoughts of running away

Spiritual

- Emptiness
- Lack of purpose
- Doubt
- Being unforgiving
- Martyrdom
- Looking for magic
- Loss of direction
- Cynicism
- Apathy

Relational

- Lack of intimacy
- Isolation
- Resentment
- Loneliness
- Lashing out
- Clamming up
- Lowered sex drive
- Nagging
- Distrust
- Fewer contacts with friends

TOP 10 LIST

Stress Reduction Tips

(After Implementing the Five Stress Management Strategies Outlined in This Chapter)

1. Simplify. Organize your time so that you do things that are most important first. Let less important things go. Remind yourself that you are not the general manager of the universe. Someone else has that job and doesn't need any help.
2. Identify things that cause you the most stress. Plan ways to get around them.
3. Concentrate on doing one task at a time. Once you have finished, take a moment to let yourself feel good about getting it done. Take a rest if you need it, and then move on.
4. If you are constantly running late, make some changes. Plan to be early to classes, appointments, etc. Allow extra time to do things and get places.
5. Learn to say "No."
6. Live within your budget and don't use credit cards for ordinary purchases.
7. Worry constructively and only about things you can control. Don't sweat the small stuff. It's all small stuff.
8. Weed out trivia. Write down important things and forget unimportant details. Don't overburden your memory. Unclutter your life. Start with cleaning out your wallet (or purse). Then your desk, or study area, then a drawer or closet.
9. Live in the present. Clear your mind of unpleasant experiences and emotions. Let it go!
10. Every night, think of one thing for which you are grateful and record it in your journal.

SLOW DOWN!