



# STRESS MANAGEMENT AND BURNOUT

Stress is a part of our lives. Any change is stressful because change requires us to make adaptations. We confront biological and psychological stress, stress in the environment and in our social situations. We have deadlines, people to meet; we face crowded traffic areas; we worry about money. We know all about stress ... or do we?

Stress is the fever of burnout. If you had pneumonia it would be essential to keep the accompanying fever down. The same is true with stress. You must bring the stress down to preserve health, but reducing stress will not eliminate the underlying cause of burnout, which is a feeling of powerlessness.

We have chosen to use stress to refer to the negative effects of life pressures and events, but more precisely we look at it as distress. When stress becomes chronic or excessive, the body becomes unable to adapt and cope. This is distress, and it exacts a toll on your body and mind.

# How is Burnout Stressful?

## 1. Loss of Control = Threat

One of the most serious threats we can encounter is uncontrollability. Striving to control the world around us is a survival drive. When we feel a loss of control, we feel threatened, and this triggers the "fight-flight" response.

## 2. Fight - Flight

When confronted with a threat, the body mobilizes to either fight the threat or to flee from it. Muscles tense, blood rushes, breathing quickens. When you neither fight nor flee, but remain in the powerless situation, the result is chronic stress.

## 3. Chronic Stress

It is unrelenting chronic stress that causes many of the symptoms of burnout, such as exhaustion, health problems, irritability, intellectual impairment, and emotional outbursts. This is why stress must be treated.



Stress management is required to keep stress or tension levels within the optimal range for performance, health and well being. In addition to exercise and social support, one requires **stress-hardiness**. Characteristics of **stress-hardiness** are *control*, *challenge*, and *commitment*. **Stress hardy** individuals see stress as a *challenge* rather than a threat; feel in *control* of their life situation; and have a sense of *commitment* rather than alienation from work, home, and family. People who enjoy a *challenge* can view stress and the future as a change for new opportunity and personal growth. If they have a sense of *control*, they know they can make lasting personal choices and influence events around them. If they have a strong sense of *commitment*, they find it easier to become involved, to be serious and interested in activities and people.

For further information contact your Health Promotion Program.



From Naval Hospital Pensacola