

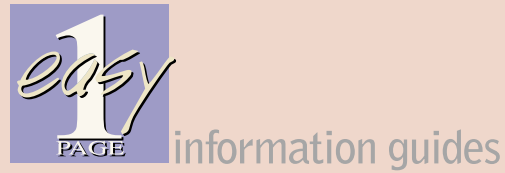
TEN QUICK TIPS

- 1 Learn to say no.** Write down five different ways to say no and practice saying it until the words roll right off your tongue.
- 2 Delegate.** Children can learn to clean their rooms and older family members can prepare meals.
- 3 Take personal time.** Nurturing yourself is not a sin, it's a health imperative. Your health is more important than whether the furniture gets dusted.
- 4 Make a list of 20 things** you really enjoy doing such as going for a walk, reading a book, listening to music, or taking a hot bath. Try to do at least two things from the list every day.
- 5 Exercise.** (30 minutes a day, 3 days a week) Of all the things you can do to lower stress, aerobic exercise is easily the most effective. Brisk walking, jumping rope, and aerobic dance all qualify.
- 6 Call a friend.** Share your troubles with someone who has been through what you're going through.
- 7 Take time to foster your #1 relationship.** Most people don't realize what an excellent buffer an intimate relationship is against stress. Healthwise, it's really worth the effort.
- 8 Pay off debt.** Debt is a highly underrated source of stress that tends to affect women more than it does men. Address this issue boldly.
- 9 Brainstorming by yourself.** Write down a nagging problem at the top of a piece of paper and see how many solutions you can jot down underneath.
- 10 You can't be all things to all people.** The legend of the super-mom is a myth. Give yourself a break!



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Women's STRESS

*Why your
stress is
different
from a
man's and
what you
can do to
cope with it*



What you need to know...

While men and women both experience stress-related medical problems such as digestive disorders, insomnia, immune system disorders, and infertility, there are some problems that primarily (or only) affect women. Here are three examples:

Menstrual problems. Stress can disrupt your cycle; it can worsen cramps and lower your tolerance for pain. It can also aggravate PMS symptoms by increasing your levels of estrogen and progesterone.

Migraine headaches. Women get migraine headaches more than men do. A migraine headache is a vascular headache *not* a tension headache. Despite this fact, stress can play a role at the onset of a migraine, when you feel the migraine coming on. As you consider the *possibility* of getting a migraine you experience increased tension which tends to make matters even worse.

Compulsive eating. Women who sacrifice their own needs for the needs of others, wind up feeling cheated and stressed. Sometimes overeating is a misguided attempt to attend to one's own needs.

Besides having different stress-related disorders from men, women also have different stressors (or *causes* of stress):

Work vs. family. Women constantly juggle these two priorities and feel stressed if *either* one suffers. A working woman rarely considers herself a success unless she's a success in both her personal *and* professional life. But a man (whose work is going well) will often feel fine about himself even if his personal life is in disarray.

Workplace discrimination. Women are sometimes relegated to support roles that leave them at a competitive disadvantage from men. When they do occupy the same jobs as men, studies

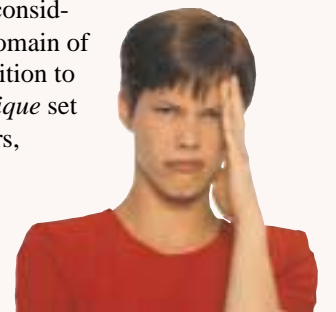
show they make 30-40% less money. Once established, these salary inequities can continue as a woman is promoted.

In addition, women face a subtler form of discrimination when it comes to what is expected of them in the workplace. Traditional male qualities such as assertiveness, competitiveness and independence are revered in a man and often reviled in a woman.

An unequal "second shift." To top it off, most working women come home to an unequal "second shift" of work: caring for children and/or an elderly parent. One study of women working in an automobile factory demonstrated that their stress levels go up at quitting time while their male counterparts go down. Apparently for women, going home at the end of the day doesn't offer any respite from stress.

Common symptoms. A recent survey of women asked: What are your symptoms of stress? Sixty percent complained of fatigue, 46% were bothered by headaches, 45% mentioned muscle tension, 45% complained of overeating, 32% said they experienced insomnia, 30% had digestive problems, 14% cited rashes and other skin complaints.

This may explain why (as they enter the workforce in ever increasing numbers) more and more women are dying of heart disease, suffering from alcoholism, and experiencing digestive disorders. These stress-related diseases were once considered the exclusive domain of men. So now, in addition to having their own *unique* set of stress and stressors, women are getting their share of *men's* stress too.



What you might ask...

I've been having difficulty getting pregnant. My doctor thinks it might be stress. Is that possible?

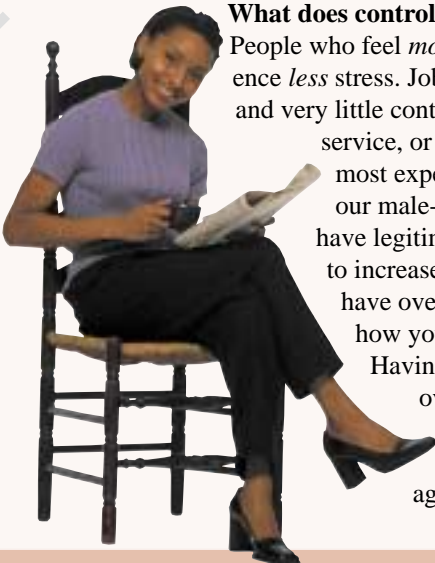
Stress can influence fertility in several ways. It can affect your production of estrogen making your cycle longer and less regular. It can also lower your production of progesterone which can affect ovulation. Prolonged stress increases the amount of prolactin (the same hormone released during breast-feeding) which, for various reasons, makes it difficult for a fertilized egg to implant itself on the walls of your uterus. To make matters worse, once you start worrying that you're not becoming pregnant, your levels of stress will go up even more.

How can stress disrupt my menstrual cycle?

Stress can play havoc with your menstrual cycle. The part of the brain (the hypothalamus) that controls the stress response also controls your menstrual cycle. Under prolonged stress many women's reproductive machinery simply shuts down resulting in the condition known as amenorrhea. Severely reduced calorie intake or extreme physical training (which also stress your body) can cause this condition also.

When I come home from work I feel frazzled. I reach for junk food to de-stress. What can I do to avoid this?

Look for healthy ways to address your stress from the moment you enter your front door. Get out of your work clothes before you go into the kitchen. Do something fast and simple for yourself, such as drinking a tall glass of ice water, or stretching a bit, or taking a quick shower. If those strategies don't work try substituting a low calorie snack like an apple, *baked* chips or air-popped popcorn for high-fat snacks like chips and chocolate.



Sometimes I feel like all my problems would be solved if I could just get a decent night's sleep. What can I do?

You are not alone. According to Dr. Joyce Walsleben, Director of the NY University Sleep Disorder Center, "women are probably the most sleep-deprived creatures on earth." People need between 7 and 10 hours of sleep a night but the average adult woman gets just over 6. Hormones, depression, and child rearing (new mothers lose up to 700 hours of sleep in the baby's first year) are just some of the factors that contribute to a woman's sleeplessness. Dr. Walsleben suggests you set regular wake-up times, meal times and work schedules. Only go to bed when you feel tired, cover the clock, (so you don't lie awake staring at it) and avoid dietary sleep inhibitors like soda, tea and coffee (with caffeine). If you do find yourself awake in the middle of the night, try to relax, use the time to practice meditation (you can do it lying down) or listen to a relaxation tape. But don't fall into the trap of worrying so much about *losing* sleep that you make it all but impossible to fall *back* to sleep. You *can* make up for lost sleep on successive nights.

What does control have to do with stress?

People who feel *more* in control usually experience *less* stress. Jobs with a lot of responsibility and very little control (like nursing, customer service, or teaching) are considered by most experts to be highly stressful. In our male-dominated society women have legitimate issues with control. Try to increase the amount of control you have over issues that affect you like how your family's income is spent. Having the decision making power over the situations that affect you personally is a surprisingly effective weapon against stress.

What you can do...

There are lots of techniques for managing stress but the following four ideas seem *particularly* well suited to the needs of women.

Take personal time. In numerous surveys women often cite a lack of personal time as a major source of stress: Examples of personal time include taking a hot bath, exercising, participating in a yoga class, seeing a movie, or simply reading a good book. One survey showed that women who took an average of 72 minutes a day to attend to personal needs were more resistant to stress related illness than those who took less than a 30 minutes per day.

However, if you are currently taking no time for yourself, the idea of taking *72 minutes a day* must seem positively laughable. Still, the goal of focusing more on yourself and your own needs, even if it's only 20 minutes a day for now, is a good place to start. Your mental and physical health is worth much more to your family and friends than whether the towels get folded or the holiday cookies get baked.

Say no. Women seem to have a hard time saying no. Dr. Harriet Braiker, a clinical psychologist, says that for many women saying "no" or "I can't" or "I'm sorry but I simply won't be able to do that" is like speaking a foreign language. When you have so many demands on your time - you will be pulled in too many directions to be effective in any single one. And if you say yes to every volunteer job and every request that comes along you will soon feel like your life is spinning out of control. For your own peace of mind you must learn to say *no*.

If saying no doesn't come easily try responding to requests by saying: "Let me check my schedule and I'll get back to you." Dr. Braiker suggests that you actually *practice saying no*. She

advises you to write down five phrases that you could say to a friend, an employer, a partner, or a child when you wish to deny a request. Practice saying it until the words roll right off your tongue.

Seek support. Feeling alone and isolated when you feel anxious, angry, or sad simply compounds your problems. Fortunately, the opposite is also true.

When you reach out to friends and loved ones in a time of need, it can be truly therapeutic. Develop a network of friends, family, and business associates you can talk to about what is going on in your life. If you have a home-based business develop friendships with other women in the same situation. If you're a single working mother spend time with other single mothers. When you share your problems with a person in the same situation you will naturally begin to get ideas for how to solve these problems.

Think about joining a support group for serious medical problems or stages of life you may be going through. Whether it's pregnancy, infant care, or elderly parents these mutual concerns can bring you together and the resulting friendships are a great buffer against stress.

Delegate. Train your family to be more self-sufficient. Even the youngest children can be taught to put dishes in the dishwasher and clothes in the hamper, and older children can take out the trash, make their beds, vacuum, and clean their own rooms. Teenagers and spouses can do the dishes, make a meal, and do the laundry. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that if certain jobs aren't done the way *you* would do them that they can't be done by someone else. This attitude will condemn you to a lifetime of unfinished "to do" lists and a never-ending burden of stress.

