

## HOW CAN YOU EFFECTIVELY COPE WITH STRESS?

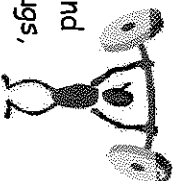
- ▶ Be patient with yourself. Realize that recovery is a long process and solving big problems takes time.
- ▶ Focus on accomplishments and progress instead of failures. Try to view recovery on a daily basis.
- ▶ Avoid comparing the patient's behavior with functioning before the injury or illness.
- ▶ Set reasonable goals by reviewing the patient's recent progress.
- ▶ Have a back up plan in case your first plan does not work.
- ▶ Check your "pressure gauge" often and ask yourself how much stress you are feeling.
- ▶ Make a "to do" list, rank order the items by priority, start with #1, and work down the list.
- ▶ Remember that taking on too much too soon may lead to failure.
- ▶ Think positive thoughts and try to keep a good sense of humor.
- ▶ Recognize that a negative or angry emotional response may push away family, friends, and health care providers.
- ▶ Avoid putting yourself down or pushing yourself too hard.
- ▶ Talk to other caregivers about how they cope successfully.
- ▶ Seek support and help from trusted friends and family members and ask them for feedback about how you are handling stress.



- ▶ Share the burden of caregiving with trusted family and friends, and consider respite care services.

- ▶ Remember that you will run the risk of emotional collapse and health problems if you do not take breaks.

- ▶ Keep up a healthy life-style by exercising, eating right, and avoiding caffeine, alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.



- ▶ Breathe slowly and deeply.

- ▶ Take time for yourself and do something enjoyable.... listen to soothing music, take a long bath, go for a walk, read a book.

- ▶ Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a pleasant situation.

- ▶ Talk to your doctor about worrisome symptoms to help sort out their cause and possible need for treatment.

**Everyone**  
struggles and feels stress  
at times. Realize that you can  
cope better by taking breaks  
and seeking support  
from others.

### National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury

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## Stress Management A Guide for Family and Friends

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GUIDE # 52

### National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury

Tools for therapy, education, self-help, and support

## WHAT IS STRESS?

The word is used often and in many different ways. **Psychologists define stress as an emotional and physical response to a frightening or unpleasant situation.** Feeling your muscles tighten and your heart beat faster, or feeling like you have little control over your emotions, are sure signs of stress. Stress is worse when you feel pressured to solve a problem immediately, but don't see any solution.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CAUSES OF STRESS?

Neurological injury or illness can bring on a period of intense and prolonged stress for patients, their family, and friends. Patients' behavioral, physical, cognitive, and emotional changes may be overwhelming or difficult to deal with. Impatience and frustration with slow progress are common. In addition, many changes, concerns, fears, and difficulties may emerge, including -

- ▶ Dramatic and sudden life and role changes
- ▶ Financial hardships
- ▶ Significant increase in responsibilities
- ▶ Worries about the patient's recovery and ability to resume prior roles, work, or education
- ▶ Difficulties obtaining necessary medical care and other services

## THE 13-ITEM STRESS TEST

To help you understand how much stress you are facing, circle T for True or F for False for each item below.

1. I have a lot to do. T F
2. I have more to do than I can handle. T F
3. I'm not being productive. T F
4. I'm trying really hard but getting nothing done. T F
5. My symptoms are getting worse. T F
6. I can't afford to take breaks or time off. T F
7. I'm pushing myself too hard. T F
8. I don't sleep very well. T F
9. Too many people are telling me what to do. T F
10. I am not treating people the way I want to be treated. T F
11. I feel totally exhausted. T F
12. Nobody is happy with what I do. T F
13. I can't stand living like this. T F

**SCORING: THE MORE TRUE RESPONSES YOU CIRCLE, THE GREATER THE STRESS AND PRESSURE YOU'RE FEELING.**

## HOW CAN STRESS BE HARMFUL TO YOU?

After neurological illness or injury, family and friends often play key roles in patients' lives. Because of their vital and often demanding roles, family and friends need to be at their best. Stress lessens the ability to do so and causes many other problems, including -

- ≡ Decreased ability to think and solve problems efficiently
- ≡ Headaches
- ≡ Heart and digestion problems
- ≡ Sleep troubles
- ≡ Low energy and motivation
- ≡ Feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless, sad, and blue
- ≡ Decreased productivity
- ≡ Anxiety and nervousness
- ≡ Relationship problems
- ≡ Irritability, short temper, impatience, and withdrawal from others

