

CNA Training Advisor

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STRESS MANAGEMENT

Since the CNA's job is to care for others, most of your day is spent directly caring for another person. In addition to that, you have your own professional and personal obligations. It is common for all people, and especially for caregivers, to experience some stress and even burnout due to the pressures and responsibilities of caregiving.

This **CNA Training Advisor** issue reviews the importance of caring for yourself first. It outlines how to do that by recognizing and dealing with stress. In addition, this issue explains burnout and suggests ways to manage it effectively.

There are many aspects of wellness. You can take care of yourself physically by getting annual physical exams, standard immunizations, and regular disease screenings. You can see a doctor when you feel ill and take care of illness as it happens.

However, managing stress is also critical to health. It is easy to get caught up in life and forget to take care of your own needs, especially when caregiving is your profession. To remain healthy, you must not look at caring for yourself as a luxury or something to do occasionally. It is a necessity, something you must practice routinely.

Talking points

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Discuss how personal sources of stress can influence job performance.
- Invite a social worker to further explain stress management techniques.
- Ask a nutritionist or physical therapist to talk about healthy diet and exercise.

Quiz answer key

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. b |
| 2. b | 7. d |
| 3. a | 8. b |
| 4. c | 9. a |
| 5. d | 10. d |

Program Prep

Program time

Approximately 30 minutes

Learning objectives

Participants in this activity will be able to:

- Identify three signs of stress
- Define burnout
- Explain two ways to deal with stress

Preparation

- Review the material on pp. 1–4
- Duplicate the **CNA Professor** insert for participants
- Gather equipment for participants (e.g., an attendance sheet, pencils, etc.)

Method

1. Place a copy of CNA Professor and a pencil at each participant's seat
2. Conduct the questionnaire as a pretest or, if participants' reading skills are limited, as an oral posttest
3. Present the program material
4. Review the questionnaire
5. Discuss the answers

SEE ALSO

hcpro.com/long-term-care

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Knowing how to care for yourself is important to maintaining your ability to care for your residents. This issue looks at ways to identify and cope with stress. In addition, we'll look at ways to identify and avoid burnout.

Stress

Stress affects everyone. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, two-thirds of office visits to family doctors are for stress-related symptoms. Almost everyone experiences events that they find difficult to cope with. In a recent poll, 89% of people said they had experienced serious stress in their lives. Stress-related mental disorders have been called the fastest growing work-related disease in the United States.

Stress is a psychological and bodily response to events that create an imbalance or sense of personal uneasiness. Stress even causes wear and tear on the body. When faced with a stressful situation, from being late for an appointment or being overwhelmed with paperwork, to caring for a sick child, the body's defenses naturally kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the fight-or-flight response. This response results in increased heart and breathing rates, muscles tightening, and essentially pushing every sense into alert mode. The response is called fight-or-flight because the person faces a decision regarding staying and dealing with the problem or trying to get away from it.

This physical response can help you deal with stressful situations by providing an extra push to do your best, stay focused and alert, and perform any necessary care for a resident. However, if a person has a great deal of responsibilities and worries, he or she may be experiencing stress quite often. This can lead to overreacting to daily situations that are the sources of stress.

The problem is that when the stress response occurs more frequently, it becomes harder to control. So instead of the heart rate and blood pressure returning to a normal level once the stressor has been eliminated, all levels remain elevated.

In addition, extended or repeated stress responses take a heavy toll on the body. Prolonged exposure to stress increases the risk of heart disease, obesity, infection, depression, and memory problems. Because of the widespread damage it can cause, it's essential to learn how to deal with stress and reduce its potentially harmful effects.

Signs of stress

Stress can cause both mental and physical symptoms. The effects of stress are different for every person. Common mental symptoms of stress include:

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- Tension
- Irritability
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling excessively tired
- Trouble sleeping

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Dry mouth
- A pounding heart
- Difficulty breathing
- Upset stomach
- Frequent urination
- Sweaty palms
- Tight muscles that may cause pain and trembling
- The body's stress response

The fight-or-flight stress response involves a number of different physical and biological changes that prepare us to deal with an emergency situation. It is designed to protect and support us. When we sense danger, a part of the brain called the hypothalamus sets off a chemical alarm. Our nervous system responds by releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol. These stress hormones flow through the bloodstream, helping us to either flee the scene or battle it out.

The process starts with increased heart rate and blood flow to the large muscles so we can run faster and fight harder. Blood vessels under the skin narrow, or constrict, to prevent blood loss in case of injury, pupils dilate for better vision, and blood sugar levels increase to provide an energy boost and speed up reaction time. At the same time, the body is conserving energy by limiting processes that are not essential to immediate survival. The digestive and reproductive systems slow down, growth hormones are switched off, and the immune response is inhibited.

While this process may have been essential to help our ancestors survive the life or death situations they commonly faced, it can have a negative impact for modern day people. Most of the stress we feel is in response to psychological rather than physi-

cal threats. For instance, caregiving and managing daily situations of living can be very stressful; however, neither situation calls for a true fight-or-flight response.

Unfortunately, our bodies don't know the difference. Whether we're stressed over an ill loved one, an argument with a friend or spouse, or financial challenges, our fight-or-flight response kicks in.

Reduce stress

Leave the situation. The simplest way to reduce stress is to briefly walk away from or end the activity that is causing the stress. Simple ways to leave a stressful situation include ending a conversation if you feel stressed or excusing yourself from a meeting if you feel overwhelmed. If you can't physically get away, try counting to 10 before responding in any way.

Breathe properly. Stressful situations cause breathing to become shallow and fast. You can teach yourself to breathe easily, which in turn lowers your stress level and helps you regain control over the effects of stress.

Abdominal breathing has a soothing effect on you because it forces you to slow down and take deep, efficient breaths. These deep breaths bring a good supply of oxygen to your brain.

Tips for effective breathing:

- Determine your breathing pattern. Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. If you're breathing correctly, or performing abdominal breathing, you'll see the hand on your stomach move while the other hand does not.
- Ensure abdominal breathing. To make sure you are breathing from your abdomen, inhale deeply, then exhale completely. Let your lungs fill with air again naturally, while your stomach expands.
- Practice breathing. Practice this belly breathing whenever you can, such as while standing in line at the grocery store, sitting through a meeting, etc.
- Use abdominal breathing. Whenever you are stressed, worried, or tense, use your breathing to

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calm yourself. Take a deep breath and let it out completely. Next, let your abdomen expand as the air comes back into your lungs. Continue this for three to five breaths.

Learn to relax

It takes a conscious effort to learn to turn off the drive to achieve and simply find satisfaction out of just being. The secret to relaxing is to find activities that give you pleasure and that add to your mental and physical well-being. Perhaps it's music, art, physical exercise, or even a warm bath. Relaxation, however, must remain the goal, not achievement.

Here are some activities that many people find relaxing.

- Trying something new. Take a class or join a group in your community. There are various local activities available through recreation departments, adult education programs, volunteer work opportunities, and college courses.
- Exercising. Exercise doesn't have to mean time in the gym. It can be something as simple as walking around your neighborhood, taking a bike ride to the park, playing golf with friends, swimming, or gardening.
- Being creative. Creative activities such as painting, playing or listening to music, making jewelry, carpentry, knitting, and cooking, can give you a sense of accomplishment through peaceful relaxation.

Once you discover your favorite relaxation activity, devote at least half an hour each day to it or relaxation time. Include it in your daily schedule, and don't allow obligations to interfere. This is an important time for you.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle

As with so many physical and mental conditions, lifestyle plays an important role in stress reduction and personal wellness. Unfortunately, stressed out people often feel as though they have no time or energy to make healthy choices. Actually, being stressed can make

a person more susceptible to making unhealthy choices. A balanced, nutrient-rich diet is a good place to start in defending your body against stress. Research suggests that what we eat contributes to mood, stress level, brain function, and energy level. A healthy diet includes the following components

1. Eat healthy carbohydrates
2. Reduce caffeine
3. Eat breakfast
4. Eat smaller meals more frequently
5. Eat foods rich in Omega-3 fatty acids

It is essential that you seek support so you don't lose the capacity to care. Burnout is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. An important way to prevent burnout is by realizing you don't have to do it all alone. Ask for help when you need it, and notify your supervisor if you have any symptoms of burnout. It doesn't reflect negatively on you as a professional. On the contrary, it proves you care enough about yourself and your residents to ensure that you stay healthy.

You might also join a professional support group. Knowing that others just like you have similar struggles can be reassuring and a good source of knowledge. It is never good to keep emotions bottled up. It is also important to accept your feelings. For instance, perhaps you are feeling unappreciated in your role as a caregiver. In turn, you feel guilty that you're having these feelings and think you're not up to your job. These are all normal feelings of burnout, which can be easily controlled.

Outcomes and the CNA

Improving outcomes for your residents is your ultimate goal. Your ability to respond to their needs affects the resident's ability to get better. However, your state of personal wellness also affects the care your residents receive. By maintaining your physical and mental health, you can better meet all the needs of your residents, and help them achieve good outcomes..

CNA Professor

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Directions: Read each question carefully, and then choose the best answer. Check the corresponding box on your answer sheet.

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Stress-related mental disorders have been called the fastest growing work-related disease in the United States.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Which of the following is a physical response to stress?
 - a. Heart pounding
 - b. Muscles tensing up
 - c. Breathing faster
 - d. All of the above
3. Burnout is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Which of the following methods would most effectively reduce stress?
 - a. Ignore it.
 - b. Eat and drink as much as you desire to satisfy all your cravings.
 - c. Take a walk outside.
 - d. All of the above.
5. What is necessary for adopting a healthy lifestyle?
 - a. A well balanced diet
 - b. Avoiding caffeine and alcohol
 - c. Regular exercise
 - d. All of the above
6. It's best to keep the first signs of burnout to yourself and not notify your supervisor since your feelings could change.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. Which of the following is a benefit of regular exercise?
 - a. Increased energy
 - b. Weight control
 - c. Better conditioned heart and lungs
 - d. All of the above
8. Self-care is a way of spoiling yourself.
 - a. True
 - b. False
9. When practicing breathing techniques to reduce stress, you should practice belly breathing.
 - a. True
 - b. False
10. Physical symptoms of stress include:
 - a. Dry mouth
 - b. Upset stomach
 - c. Tight muscles
 - d. All of the above