

Editor's Note: Stress is a normal part of the life of a resident. Once you identify the signs of stress, how do you cope with it? In this second of two articles on stress, experts provide their advice.

Take Action Before Stress Takes its Toll

"Yes, I'm stressed," you admit. "So is everyone else around me. Now what?"

When you recognize that stress is the underlying problem, and that it affects the way you behave and perform, you're already on the right track. Seasoned doctors understand this problem and have encouraging words for you.

You're Not Alone

"Don't suffer in silence—get help," James Martin, M.D. tells doctors who are feeling overwhelmed by the stress that accompanies their residency.

In his role as program director for the Family Practice Residency Program at CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health Care in San Antonio, Texas, Martin understands very well the pressures of the medical profession. And as president of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), he also sees what programs around the country are doing to help residents deal with

stress.

Stress relief may be as close as your program schedule and faculty. "Most programs try to be proactive to keep stress from reaching dangerous levels," says Martin, "and most are doing it well. The best programs work to balance the curriculum and schedule, for example, alternating a difficult rotation with a less stressful one. Also, easily accessible faculty can help residents feel less isolated in their decision making about patient care. Keeping those lines of communication open is essential."

Residents can also learn from faculty members how they manage to balance their own schedules, says Martin. "Residents need to see faculty as having time for family, exercise, hobbies and community. It's an important lesson: a physician's life can be balanced, and it's possible to do several things and do them well."

"A Sacred Vocation"

In his recent research on stress in the work environment, Ben Amick, Ph.D. at the Univer-

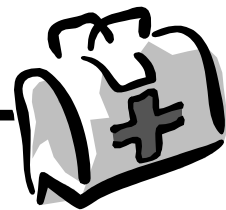
CONFIDENTIAL

For immediate help with stress-related problems, your first resource is the Resident Assistance Program Hotline, 813-870-3344.

Stress can show up in a number of ways, and even medical professionals may not recognize it in themselves. But when stress or other challenges of your residency begin to make you feel out of sorts or out of control, RAP, offered by Wood & Associates is as close as your phone.

sity of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston, found that physicians and other health care workers are less affected by stress when they are able to find meaning in their work. "It's not just about diagnosing and treating, it's about helping people to heal," says Amick, an Associate Professor of Behavioral Sciences and Epidemiology. "When doctors

Continued on next page



People who laugh actually live longer than those who don't laugh. Few persons realize that health actually varies according to the amount of laughter.

Dr. James Walsh

What topics would you like to see ?
Contact the editor by e-mail:
patricianalexander@earthlink.net



Money Matters

Conquering Financial Stress

There are a number of practical things you can do to get things back under control if you are having financial problems, say the authors of “The Stress Solution: An Action Plan to Manage the Stress in Your Life.” (1) make a budget; (2) construct a realistic five-year financial plan; (3) hold family business meetings; and (4) get financial advice from a professional who’s trained and equipped to deal with finances.

“In many instances,” the authors continue, “financial woes involve other people—your spouse, children, friends and family. When this is the case, it’s not enough to get your financial affairs in order, you have to involve others in the program.” Communicate your financial goals to get everyone pulling in the same direction, they advise.

“It’s particularly important to communicate with your creditors when you get behind in your payments. Most of them will be willing to work out some kind of schedule with you if you’ll just talk to them.”

Source: “The Stress Solution: An Action Plan to Manage the Stress in Your Life,” by Lyle H. Miller, Ph.D., Alma Dell Smith, Ph.D., with Larry Rothstein, Ed.D.; Pocket Books, 1993

“Money Matters” courtesy of Julio C. Muniz, Muniz and Associates, Tampa, Florida, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) and a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU).
www.munizandassociates.com

Before Stress Takes its Toll, continued

understand that they are in a ‘sacred vocation,’ it can ease the burdens they feel relating to money, studying, lack of sleep and all the other trials and tribulations of residency.”

Building a Support Network

“Work conditions create situations which place demands on the body and mind that often aren’t easily manageable,” says Amick. “Different residents may experience workplace stressors in different ways. The support they get from others can be very important.”

If you haven’t had time to build a network of friends and colleagues, it’s a wise investment for your sense of well being. Schedule activities you enjoy with others away from work, and take advantage of opportunities to socialize even in a small way, like staff birthday celebrations or holiday events. Give yourself permission to play and have a good laugh.

“I can’t say enough about having a sense of humor,” says Martin. “A good joke and the ability to laugh is so important.” Laughter and light heartedness can actually defuse stress in a very healthy way. Studies have shown that laughter reduces at least four neuroendocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortisol, dopac, and growth hormone—that are associated with the stress response.

“Being a doctor is the most wonderful job in the world,” Martin tells residents who wonder whether all the stress is worth it. “It gets easier. And it gets more fun.”

Tips for Reducing and Controlling Your Stress

Shed the “Superman/Superwoman” urge – Ask yourself, “What really needs to be done?” “How much can I do?” “Is the deadline realistic?” and “What adjustments can I make?” Ask for help if you need it. If you feel overwhelmed by some activities, learn to say “no.”

Meditate – Just 10 to 20 minutes of quiet reflection may bring relief from chronic stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. Use the time to listen to music, relax and clear your mind.

Exercise – Regular exercise is an effective way to relieve stress. Twenty to 30 minutes of daily physical activity benefits both the body and the mind.

Healthy lifestyle – Good nutrition makes a difference. Limit your intake of fast food, caffeine and alcohol (alcohol actually disturbs, not helps, regular sleep patterns).

Give in occasionally – Be flexible. If you find you meet with constant opposition in your personal or professional life, rethink your position or strategy. Make allowances for other’s opinions and be prepared to compromise. Not only will you reduce your stress, you may find better solutions to your problems as a result.

Source: The National Mental Health Association www.nmha.org (adapted)