



STRESS & DEPRESSION

Text Button H

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

ERASE

- **E**xercise
- **R**elaxation
- Other Enjoyable **A**ctivities
- **S**upportive Relationships
- **E**mootional Expression

How can a resident get adequate exercise? Residents may find it challenging to get to a gym or sports club on a regular basis. Consider sharing exercise time with significant others and family. Look for gyms that have off-hours that accommodate resident schedules. Consider activities that can be done at home or in the hospital setting. Stairs offer opportunities for vigorous aerobic exercise, pipes can be used for chin-ups, and floors are readily available for push-ups. Even a brisk 10 minute walk around the hospital (if safe) can be invigorating and provide a sense of getting away for a moment. Some hospitals have put treadmills, free weights, and a few machines in a lounge area for residents and many residency programs offer intramural team sports. Some offer residents free or reduced memberships in local fitness facilities; ask if a personal trainer can help with a 20-minute routine, one that alternates between aerobic exercise and a short strength-training workout.

Relaxation techniques are proven stress relievers and could be included in the curriculum for residents, family members, and even patients. These include deep-breathing exercises, meditation, and imagery. Bathrooms, lounge areas, or call rooms can be used for a 5-minute meditation break. Settings don't have to be elaborate. Another simple method is to put on a CD with soothing music or sounds of nature for 5 minutes. Use earphones to drown out noise. A 6-minute power nap is another option.

Outside activities are very important. Residents need to nurture a healthy life outside of medicine and maintain non-medical interests. Ask residents what they enjoyed doing before medical school. Sometimes it is useful to encourage residents to maintain outside interests that remain relatively stable to contrast the instability and ever-changing status of the patients they care for. An example of this is photography. Every time you look at a picture you've taken, it is the same. Unlike a patient, a picture won't crash on you overnight. Look for something concrete to balance the ambiguity of medicine. Examples include arts and crafts, hobbies, religious affiliations, humor, vacations, sex, music, fishing, and other pleasurable activities.



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STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES (CONT'D)

Support systems are another important source of stress relief. Family, significant others, and friends can all help alleviate pressure. Short phone calls and email reinforce relationships and ease strain. Forming alliances with other residents reduces the competitive atmosphere that pervades most training settings and emphasizes the spirit of cooperation. Residents can help each other out, volunteering on busy services when possible. Making friends with staff such as EMTs, nurses, and PAs can make life on the floor easier. These professionals are enormous resources. Encourage residents to have some of their supports be people who won't talk medicine with them. A strong spiritual relationship can also be helpful. Many residents manage stress from the perspective of spirituality, within either the structure of a formal faith or a "world view" that acknowledges something greater and beyond themselves. Spiritual directors can be a resource. Counseling, too, can be important. Counseling should be considered or recommended any time the effects of stress interfere with the resident's performance or the function of the medical system. Residents can frequently access free counseling through an EAP.

Finally, emotional expression is also vital. Emotions are normal, healthy responses to life events. Residents need to express their feelings in safe and appropriate ways. People who express emotions are better able to understand and cope with them, and can be more effective in coping with other peoples' feelings. Speaking with close friends, family members, and faculty, and keeping a journal (e.g. create narratives or poems) can help to satisfy the need for emotional clarity and expression. Helping with emotional expression is another role that counseling plays.