



Fort Riley Public Health Department

Located in the Caldwell Clinic Building

Public Health Newsletter, February 2024

Five Ways to Manage Stress in Less Than Five Minutes!

Stress kills. Many of us can imagine a person receiving news that is so shocking that it gives them a heart attack. That's not how stress kills most of us, but stress creates a physical response in our bodies. No matter how mentally tough we think we are, constant stress over years can have devastating long-term effects on our bodies. Chronic stress makes us more likely to develop anxiety, depression, heart attacks, strokes, even cancer or dementia.

Within our military communities, we are all exposed to stress. Before Soldiers set foot in a potential war-zone, they and their families experience many stressors. There is the stress of training, being separated from loved ones, finding a partner or raising a family. There is even the stress of moving, being the new person in a group, or starting over. When stress is not treated, it can lead to more serious mental health disorders. Mental health disorders are the second most common reason for hospitalization across the Department of Defense.

The three most important daily habits you can do to minimize your stress response is to implement the Performance Triad of sleeping at least seven (7) hours per day, eating mostly plants every meal, and exercising at least five (5) days per week for at least 30 minutes (or 150 minutes per week). Healthy life habits build up your ability to withstand stress. If you notice that you are stressed right now, here are five (5) things you can do in less than five (5) minutes. Think BALMS:

- B**reathe Take 10 deep breaths. Allow the breath to completely expand your chest, ribs and belly and release belly, ribs chest.
- A**ppreciate Write down three things you feel thankful for. If you have three minutes, spend a minute writing about why you are thankful for each of those things.
- L**augh Find a funny skit to watch, have a few laughs.
- M**ove Take a walk away from your current situation. Outside and alone with your thoughts.
- S**tretch Take a 3 minute stretch break. Whether you've downloaded the latest yoga app or paying attention to what muscles feel tight, spending 3 minutes stretching combined with deep breathing creates helps you enter stressful situations with calm.

Never underestimate the power of asking for help. You can call a trusted friend to ask for help shifting your perspective on a situation. Chaplains are also trained to listen and counsel whether or not you have a religious affiliation. Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC) are also available for listening to your thoughts. The Army Wellness Center has stress management classes.

Being mentally tough is not about ignoring stress, it is essential to acknowledge it and take breaks from stressful situations so we can ultimately be better both at home and at work.

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