



Mental Health Association of Tarrant County
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Dealing with the Stress of War

The war with Iraq and threat of terrorist attacks at home are creating varying levels of stress for all Americans. When prolonged, stress can chip away at one's mental and physical health. Stress makes it increasingly hard to cope with everyday tasks and puts you at risk for a number of health problems, such as high blood pressure.

If you've been carrying around too much stress lately, it's possible to deal with it and even redirect it in positive ways to help you get through the challenging days ahead.

Here are the warning signs of "stress overload":

- Persistent fatigue
- Inability to concentrate
- Flashes of anger or lashing out at family and friends
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs
- Repeated tension headaches, lower back aches, stomach problems or other physical ailments
- Prolonged feelings of depression, anxiety or helplessness

These are steps you can take to get out from under the stress:

- **Stay connected.** You're not alone in this, so don't withdraw. Talk to family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers about your stress and fears. They may be experiencing some of the same feelings as you. Possibly they can share something helpful. Other sources of support may be your place of worship or your company's employee assistance program, which may offer the first few mental health consultations free of charge. Dependents of military personnel should find out what kind of assistance is available through their branch's family services.
- **Get physical.** Reduce stress by developing a regular exercise routine. Try walking around the block each evening, playing tennis, working in the garden or just doing stretching exercises in your living room.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Just like stress, they rob you of energy and cloud your perceptions of everyone and everything.
- **Make time for relaxation.** Try to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying about things you can't control. A good way to do this is to cut down or eliminate activities that cause you stress. For example, spend less time watching the news and more time relaxing. Catch a movie, join a club, call a friend, go fishing, go to a concert or play with the dog. Schedule time for doing things you find relaxing.
- **Take back some control.** You can't control the war or events at home associated with it, but you can exercise control over some things. Maintain your routine as much as possible. Try writing a letter to a friend or relative serving overseas. Attend a meeting on community preparedness. Send a donation to a relief fund. Volunteer. There are many organizations that could use your help.

- **Take reasonable precautions.** Make an emergency communications plan with family and friends. Re-introduce yourself to neighbors and exchange phone/cell phone numbers. Stay informed about current events, but don't become obsessed by the news coverage of impending war.
- **Be optimistic about the challenges ahead.** Try to maintain a positive outlook. Remember that our nation has survived other difficult times. Stay in touch with your spirituality, if you find it comforting.
- **Seek professional help** if you feel your problem is more serious and you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, hopelessness or extreme anger. This could be especially important for those who live with depression, substance abuse problems, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder. Your local mental health association can help you find a social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist in your community.

***For More Information:** Please contact the Mental Health Association of Tarrant County, 817-335-5405, www.mhatc.org or the National Mental Health Association for resources available to help you and others cope with tragic events, loss and other topics. To obtain this information, go to www.nmha.org/reassurance/anniversary/index.cfm or call our toll-free line 800-969-NMHA (6642).*