

PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR MANAGING STRESS

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In “Stress: Curse or Blessing?” we looked at spiritual resources to handle the normal and extraordinary stresses of life. These are our first line of defense in dealing with stress. However, God has also given us a sound mind to use in dealing with life. When we employ practical resources to manage stress, we are using the sound mind God has given us to live in healthy ways.

Ephesians 5:15 says to “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise, but as wise.” Practical resources are in fact spiritual resources, but we do not often think of them as such. Here are some practical resources which will help you live with the stress of life in a wise way.

1. **Sleep.** We can miss sleep on occasion and function on less sleep for periods of time. But prolonged periods of inadequate sleep will significantly reduce our ability to cope with the normal stresses of life, let alone extraordinary stress that may happen. Dr. Archibald Hart in his book *Adrenaline and Stress*, has an excellent chapter on sleep.
 - a. Do you know how much sleep you need?
 - b. Do you have a consistent pattern of sleep, for example, a regular time to bed and a regular time to rise?
 - c. Are you able to discipline yourself to go to bed at a regular time or do you consistently stay up working, reading, or watching TV?
 - d. Do you have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep?
2. **Diet.** “You are what you eat” may be truer than we think! A healthy diet leads to a healthy body which increases your capacity to handle stress.
 - a. What you eat affects your capacity to handle stress. Coffee, chocolate, tea, colas, and other foods high in caffeine pump adrenaline into your system and increase your stress. Sweets can have a similar effect on your system. These may not affect all people the same. However, it is important to consider a healthy well-balanced diet where these elements are taken in moderation. Ask yourself: Do I use caffeine or sugar to keep me going when I should be resting or sleeping?
 - b. How much you eat also affects your capacity to handle stress. This is most true in terms of your weight. Do you know your optimum weight for your height? Excess weight, even if you are not considered obese, increases the stress on your body and decreases the energy available for handling normal stresses. It is also possible to be underweight because we are too busy to eat or are preoccupied with looking good. Neither extreme is healthy.

3. **Physical exercise.**

- a. Regular physical exercise strengthens the heart and lungs which increases and maintains the body's ability to deal with the physiological effects of stress.
- b. It also increases the blood flow to the brain which improves concentration and decision-making ability.
- c. Exercise generates endorphins which improves perspective.
- d. All three of these factors improve your ability to deal with stress. They have an impact even on your ability to use spiritual resources. Exercise does not have to be physically exhausting. Brisk walking for thirty minutes a day can do wonders in managing stress. The key is that it is consistent and regular.

4. **Physical and mental relaxation.** Several physical relaxation techniques can help you in times of severe stress or can help high-strung people deal with life in general. These would include relaxation techniques such as breathing from the diaphragm, tense -relax muscle exercises, a hot bath, and a short nap.

Mental relaxation could include listening to soothing music while lying down or reclining, reading a favorite novel, watching a good video, playing games, going for a walk to a peaceful or beautiful spot, and laughter through reading, videos, jokes, etc.

5. **Lifestyle.** Some of the stress that we deal with is the result of the fact that our life is not in order. This relates to the idea of "junk stress." Try to identify areas of your life that are out of balance and which may be causing unnecessary stress.
6. **Relationships.** Being loved, valued, and cared for in our relationships is a shelter from stress. Just as a loving mom or dad calms an injured child with their love, so good relationships can be a healing balm. For this reason we need at least one supportive relationship in our lives—a relationship in which we can talk about anything that may be stressing us.

We also need to maintain and work out conflicts in the important relationships in our lives such as spouses, children, supervisors, co-workers, neighbors and friends. We need to resolve hurt and anger quickly, "so that the devil will not gain a foothold."

An important part of good relationships is taking time to have fun together. It's easy to let work crowd out fun in our lives. Take time to have dinner or dessert with friends, go for a picnic, have a party, etc.