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STRESS AT WORK

Managing your everyday work stress well can actually help you improve your management of diabetes and prevent complications to your eyes. Henry Lew, psychologist, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, shows you how to relax to reduce mental stress.

Work stress can be short term, from doing a presentation at work to running late for work. It can also be long term, from working for a demanding boss to long working hours.

STRESS AND DIABETES

Work stress causes our body to make energy by increasing glucose and fat to help it manage the stress. But in diabetes, this stress response does not work so well, because insulin is not always available to allow extra energy into the body's cells. Glucose can thus build up in the bloodstream.

Both mental and physical stress have been known to cause blood sugar levels to rise in people with diabetes, especially in those with type 2. Physical stress, such as illness or injury, causes higher blood glucose levels in people with either type of diabetes.

Furthermore, People under stress may not take good care of themselves. They may drink more alcohol or exercise less. They may forget, or not have time, to check their glucose levels or plan good meals. Hence, it is crucial to learn how to manage work stress to improve our management of our glucose levels.

REDUCING MENTAL STRESS

Making changes

You may be able to get rid of some stresses of life. If traffic upsets you, for example, try to find a new route to work or leave home early enough to avoid the traffic congestions. If your job drives you crazy, apply for a transfer if you can, or discuss with your boss how to improve your work flow. There are other ways to fight stress:

- Start an exercise programme or join a sports team
- Take dance lessons or join a dancing club
- Pick up a new hobby or learn a new craft
- Volunteer at a hospital or charity

LEARNING TO RELAX

Breathing

Sit or lie down and uncross your legs and arms. Take in a deep breath. Then push out as much air as you can.

Breathe in and out again, this time relaxing your muscles on purpose while breathing out.

Keep breathing and relaxing for 5 to 20 minutes at a time. Do the breathing exercises at least once a day.

Exercise

Another way to relax your body is by moving it through a wide range of motions. Three ways to loosen up through movement are circling, stretching, and shaking parts of your body. To make this exercise more fun, move with music and with a partner.

Whatever method you choose to relax, make a routine of it. Just as it takes weeks or months of practice to learn a new sport, it takes practice to learn relaxation.

Support Groups

Some sources of stress will probably never go away, no matter what you do. Still, there are ways to reduce these stresses. Support groups and friends can help. Knowing other people in the same situation helps you feel less alone. You can also learn other people's experiences as they cope with their problems.

Counselling

Sometimes stress can be so severe that you feel overwhelmed. In such cases, counselling or psychotherapy may help. Talking with a therapist may help you come to grips with your situation. You may learn new ways of coping or new ways of changing your behaviour.

*References:
American Diabetes Association*