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Stress: Acknowledge and Deal With It

At some point in our lives, we all experience the type of stress that is almost unbearable. It consumes us, eating us alive and spitting us out into a new version of ourselves. This time of year can be particularly difficult for a variety of reasons. Here's the thing: We are not alone and we CAN recover.

Mental health education is not black and white. It is not the ability to identify a weed or insect and apply exact solutions. At Nebraska Extension, we know that mental well-being is complicated and hidden to the untrained eye, but we also know the research behind stress and effective coping strategies to combat chronic stress.

First, recognize symptoms of ongoing stress in yourself:

- Emotional - difficulty making decisions, lack of joy, moodiness, or hopelessness
- Physical – lack of energy, headaches, frequent illness, teeth grinding
- Behavioral – sleeping too much or too little, alcohol or drug use, isolation, impatience

Keep things in perspective. Ask yourself “Are my fears realistic?” “Next year, how important will this be?” “What can I do that is within my control?”

Use helpful self-talk and let go of blame, telling yourself “This is a learning experience.” “I did the best I could in that situation.” “I must remember to focus on controlling what is controllable.”

Be aware of automatic assumptions you make in certain situations. Don't always assume the worst of situations or people. Sometimes we tend to blame others for our issues when stressed. Try to look at the matter as a challenge to overcome with creative strategies rather than as a hopeless problem. A positive attitude makes it easier to work with others and find solutions.

Develop a stress-resistant personality. Set realistic goals and expectations. Prioritize time for leisure activities. Share responsibilities and ask for help. Connect with a positive friend that is supportive, because starting a conversation about your stress can be the best therapy possible. Consider seeking out a professional counselor or a confidential phone line program if you feel completely alone, overwhelmed and hopeless. More and more Nebraskans are doing this. You are not alone.

Create ways to decrease stress. Stay active and sit less. Keep a regular sleep schedule with a consistent waking time. Try cutting out processed foods. Take time for yourself to pick up with neglected hobby. Spend time with people and pets you love and avoid negative people. Look for humor in everything you do. Politely stand up for yourself and say “no” if there is too much on your plate. Ask for help if you could use it.

Find ways to give to your community in ways that cost you nothing, whether it's volunteering,

performing random acts of kindness for strangers, or making an effort to check in with those who could use an uplifting conversation. Giving, in itself, can be the best way to decrease your own stress!

For more information and helpful resources for stress and depression, including helpline phone numbers and text lines, visit ruralwellness.unl.edu or contact ruralwellness@unl.edu.