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Finding Ways to **COPE**

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Stress can elevate your blood pressure, blood sugar, and blood lipids.

Are things out of control in your life? Are you faced with unrelenting pressures and deadlines? Maybe you are overcommitted and trying to do more than you can realistically accomplish in a given time. Do you feel overwhelmed by financial or family problems? Are you failing to achieve the high expectations you have set for yourself? Maybe you constantly feel fatigued, and are becoming inefficient, and enjoying life less and less.

The ongoing pressures of daily life can really wear you down. Unmanaged stress can lead to high blood pressure, elevated blood sugar and blood lipids, insomnia, ulcers and irritable bowel, tension headaches, backaches, allergies, and a depressed immune system with an increased susceptibility to infections and illness. Stress can also worsen an asthmatic condition.

Overloaded circuits have a way of blowing a fuse. With the constant pressure from stressful situations, many people experience lapses in concentration, memory failure, and depression. Unresolved stress can produce irregular heart-

beats, angina, and even premature heart attack. Stress can also quicken a person's breathing rate, causing shallow breathing and a minimal air exchange. Deep breathing can be a useful way to help a person to relax.

There are a number of other ways to cope effectively with ongoing stress:

- ▶ **Identify the stress factors in your life.**
- ▶ **Learn to set boundaries.**
- ▶ **Prioritize your tasks.**
- ▶ **Have a regular exercise program.**
- ▶ **Take time to relax, and get adequate sleep.**
- ▶ **Keep connected with supportive friends and family.**
- ▶ **Get involved with an enjoyable hobby.**
- ▶ **Have a sense of humor.**
- ▶ **Find time to serve those in real need.**
- ▶ **Take time for prayer and reflection on God's Word.**

In addition, some people get help dealing with stress by recalling to memory an enjoyable occasion, a meaningful experience, or a peaceful moment they have personally experienced. These moments of quiet reflection include thoughtful contemplation of what Christ has done for them, remembering a favorite place on vacation, or recalling a good deed done to someone in need.

Stress may be substantially dissipated when God answers the earnest prayer:

“Lord give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Winston Craig is professor of nutrition at Andrews University.

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