

How to manage stress for improving quality of life

Shelly Iskandar, dr., SpAkp, SpKJ, M.Si, PhD

Psychiatry Department, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia

Stress is defined as a condition in which expectations, whether genetically programmed, established by prior learning, or deduced from circumstances, do not match current or anticipated perceptions of the internal or external environment. Stress can be perceived as eustress, which is a term for positive stress, and distress, which refers to negative stress. Stress should be managed well to maintain good quality of life. WHO defines Quality of Life as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. Furthermore, disability to handle stress may lead to mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and other mental disorders. There are several ways to manage stress: attend to spiritual needs (e.g., by meditating, visualizing, praying, appreciating a beautiful sunset); make a list of the things that are troubling or causing tension, and then put away the list for the rest of the day; prioritize personal challenges and deal with the ones that are either most stressful or easiest to check off the list; spend ample time with people whose company is enjoyable, generally those who have a positive and respectful attitude; talk to a trustworthy friend or family member about own feelings and concerns, and discuss possible reasons for those feelings; ask them just to listen if advice is not desired. Specific treatment from professionals such as mindfulness and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and medication are needed if those early approaches are not helping. This intervention should be conducted together with good nutrition and physical exercise. A diet high in vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, beans, cereals, grains, fish, and unsaturated fats such as olive oil and supplemented with fish oil can reduce depression and increase wellbeing. Exercise increases the ability of neurons to communicate with one another and cause an increase in the production of neuropeptide Y (NPY) and brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) which are for nerve growth and survival.