



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Stress vs. Anxiety

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When you reflect back on the past few years, can you identify a time when you felt stressed? Anxious? Both? Most of us have experienced stress and anxiety at some point in our lives, but is there a difference between the two?

Stress and anxiety are both part of the body's natural adrenal fight, flight, or freeze response to a perceived external threat so it can be difficult to distinguish which one you are experiencing. They tend to have similar physical and emotional responses. For example, they can both cause irritability, anger, fatigue, muscle pain, gut issues, elevated heart rate, and difficulty sleeping. But you can look for some key differences.

Stress

Stress is the way the body responds to an external trigger of a perceived threat. When the body feels threatened, it releases stress hormones, resulting in more blood pumping into the necessary organs to ensure the person is alert and able to respond to the threat. This process happens rapidly and is the body's natural response to stress. These bodily responses can be short or long term, depending on the circumstances of the stressor.

An example of an external trigger that may cause stress could be a priority work deadline, conflict with a partner, or something like chronic illness or discrimination. Eventually, with healthy coping skills, stress can be managed and symptoms can be reduced.

Anxiety

Anxiety on the other hand, originates internally and is a specific reaction to the stress a person is feeling. Anxiety is more persistent and lingers on despite the absence of the stressor. For example, the work deadline has passed and yet you continue to experience excessive worry about it.

Additionally, people who experience anxiety may not be able to identify what that caused them to feel anxious; it's simply there and may not seem like anything triggered it. People with anxiety experience issues similar to stress including fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and muscle tension. The major difference is that anxiety will generally persist for a longer period of time (months) and the person will have difficulty managing their worry.

Managing Your Feelings

Now that you can identify whether you may be feeling stress or anxiety (or both), what kind of things can you do to help manage these feelings? Focusing on incorporating relaxation techniques, physical activity, a nutritious diet, and getting adequate sleep are great ways to start. Relaxation techniques can include breathing exercises, guided meditation, or physical activities such as yoga or tai chi to calm the body. Physical activity like the ones noted, or even a brisk walk, can help reduce stress.

However, despite their best efforts of self-care, it can still be challenging for some to reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress. If you continue to struggle with managing stress or anxiety over a longer period of time and want more support with identifying coping strategies and tools, it may be helpful to engage with services with a

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licensed mental health professional. First Choice Health EAP can connect you with mental health services by calling 1-800-777-4114 or making a request on our website at www.firstchoiceEAP.com.

References:

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