

Make Stress Work For You

(NAPSA)—People tend to talk about stress as if it's all bad. It's not.

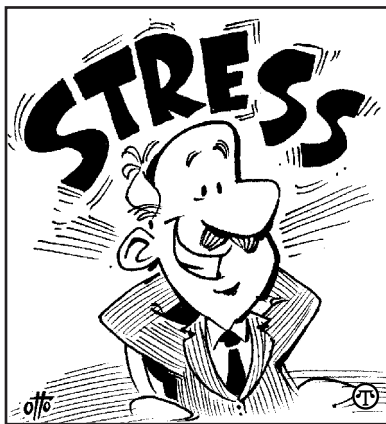
"Some stress is good for you," says Dr. Esther Sternberg at NIH's National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). "I have to get my stress response to a certain optimal level so I can perform in front of an audience when I give a talk."

While some stress is good, however, too much is not. "If you're too stressed, your performance falls off," Dr. Sternberg says. "The objective should be not to get rid of stress completely because you can't get rid of stress—stress is life, life is stress. Rather, you need to be able to use your stress response optimally."

How much we're able to do that is the challenge, Dr. Sternberg admits. It may not be possible in all situations, or for all people. "Your goal should be to try to learn to control your stress to make it work for you," she says.

Dr. Sternberg has been studying the links between the mind and the body for years. She and other scientists have found that too much stress can harm the immune system. A growing number of studies show that lowering your stress can actually help your immune system.

To control stress, first try to identify the things in your life that cause it: marital problems, conflict at work, a death or illness in the family. If there's a problem that can be solved, set about taking control and solving it. For example, you might decide to



change jobs if problems at work are making you too stressed.

Some stressors can't be changed. In that case, support groups, relaxation, meditation, and exercise are all tools you can use to manage your stress. If none of these seems to work for you, don't hesitate to ask a health professional for help.

One other thing you need to remember: If you do these things and you're not successful in lowering your stress, it's not your fault because biology plays a major role. "You need to know the benefits of the system," Dr. Sternberg says, "and its limitations as well."

In other words, try not to get too stressed about being stressed.

For more information from the National Institute of Mental Health about mental health, visit <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/index.cfm>, call (301) 443-4513 or write to NIMH Public Inquiries, 6001 Executive Boulevard, Rm. 8184, MSC 9663, Bethesda, MD 20892-9663.