Hispanics and Stress: Mind/Body Health

Nearly all Americans experience stress, and many engage in unhealthy behaviors such as comfort eating, poor diet choices, smoking and inactivity to cope with their stress and other emotions, according to a 2006 national survey conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) and released in partnership with the National Alliance for Hispanic Health and the National Women's Health Resource Center. Yet compared to the general population, Hispanics are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors, such as exercising and spending time with friends and family, to manage stress. Unfortunately, stress is still a major health concern for Hispanics with more than half reporting that they are worried about stress in their daily lives.

What you can do

Many of the most common long-term stressors arise simultaneously and without warning. Survey results reveal that the worst effects of stress come from a combination of many stressful events piling up on each other. Often these strains are linked to family, personal health and financial concerns. Learning to deal with stress effectively is a worthwhile effort, even if you already consider yourself capable of handling anything life sends your way. Following are some tips for effective stress management from the APA:

- **Define stress —** How do you experience stress? Different people experience stress differently. How do you know when you are stressed?
- **Identify stressors in your life —** What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Are they related to work, home, relationships or something else?
- **Identify coping mechanisms —** What do you do specifically to deal with stress? Is it a healthy behavior such as exercise or an unhealthy behavior such as smoking?
- **Change your behavior —** Determine if you are relying on unhealthy behaviors like smoking or eating to manage stress. If so, you'll want to change these behaviors to healthier ways of coping such as exercising. Don't try to change more than one behavior at a time.
- **Have a plan and take decisive actions —** Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Make decisions about your actions, rather than detaching from problems and stresses and wishing they would go away.
- **Take care of yourself —** Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with stress. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Eat healthy. Make sure you get enough rest and sleep.



- **Get support —** Maintaining strong relationships with close family members, friends or others is important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen, strengthens your resilience and ability to manage stress. If you feel overwhelmed, or if the reasons behind stress are emotional, consider seeking professional help. Psychologists are uniquely trained to understand the mind/body connection and to offer strategies for maintaining a healthy mind and body.

It's okay to ask for help in dealing with stress

If you or a family member continues to experience stress, asking for help can be one of the quickest ways to recover a sense of control and balance. For many people, using the skills of stress management will help. But for individuals — and families — who are unable to perform the functions of daily life as a result of stress, seeking the help of a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can help.

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Information contained in this tip sheet should not be used as a substitute for professional health and mental health care or consultation. Individuals who believe they may need or benefit from care should consult a psychologist or other licensed health/mental health professional.