

Controlling your Thoughts

Do long lines at the grocery store agitate you? Do you find yourself sitting in traffic and tapping your fingers on the steering wheel? Do you become angry over something simple like a glass of spilled milk? These situations can happen repeatedly throughout your day, draining you of energy and taking a toll on your mind and body. You *can* change this.

First you need to understand what stress is and how it happens. Stress can be positive as it gets us going and motivated in our day. But the stress that negatively impacts us is the feeling created when we think we have lost control of a situation. This feeling is part instinct due to our “fight or flight” response, needed to survive in past generations; and part to do with the way we think. The part we can learn to manage is the way we think, our perception.

Understanding your perception of stress is key to managing your reactions. Situations are not stressful in their own right. Rather, it is your interpretation of the situation which drives the level of stress you feel. Perceptions are influenced by a perceived threat created by the situation we are experiencing. Some common threats include feeling inadequate, worrying what others will think and the inability to control a situation or outcome. These feelings create habits of thinking that become our subconscious responses that then become “automatic pilot” reactions. At times, our perceptions can also lead us to react with more emotional intensity than what the experience warrants. This is often referred to as overreacting.

If you uncover why you perceive a situation as stressful, you can start to develop a planned thought process that can minimize the stress response and its impact on your mind and body. You need to understand the process by which you observe personal thoughts and become aware of what is going through your mind. Different situations create different reactions; however, the mental process is the same. In order to change your reaction, determine the underlying threat this situation poses.

You can choose to feel less stressed. Your goal is to develop a stress reaction plan so you are in control of your stress reactions versus your reactions controlling you. You may be able to do this individually or you may want a friend help you to think out loud. If you manage your thinking to control your stress reactions, you will have more energy to do the things you enjoy doing.

Would you like assistance in designing a personal stress reaction plan? A health behavior coach provides ideas and guidance on how to live a more stress free life. Contact Mutch Women’s Center for Health Enrichment at (605) 328-7155 today to schedule a healthy lifestyle consultation.



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