

# Stress Management

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Stress affects every living thing. All human beings are acted upon by stress and respond accordingly. The stress that most people – caregivers, in this instance – are concerned with has three components:

1 Thoughts

2 Physical Response

3 Behavior

If we could take our stress apart, we would see that these three things occur in order. Thoughts then physical response then behavior; but each follows the other so quickly, it's hard to separate them. As one cycle of these three finish, another cycle of the same begins; and we can be caught in a “squirrel cage” of stress.

What gets this stress cycle started? Provocation. Someone pushing our buttons. Someone saying or doing something that upsets us. This fourth component – Provocation – is the only component that is outside our influence. We have no control over what someone else says or does. Because of this, very little will be said about provocation here.

The other three components are within ourselves, and we have every right to manage these things. Notice the word “control” is not used here. If we could totally control any of this, it wouldn't be a problem. So, since most of us are a little less than perfect, we can be satisfied with managing ourselves and our thoughts, physical responses, and behavior. Notice that nothing new has to occur from the Provocation end of things for the cycle to go on and on and on (inside us).

If you can recognize your own personal physical response to stress, it allows you to do something to change it. So, if your stomach pain tips you off that you are stressed, you can decide to do something about the stomach pain (maybe drink some water or sit down for a minute and just breathe). When the pain subsides, you can ask yourself what it was that caused the stress/pain.

Maybe your loved one said, “You don't care about me.” Then maybe you thought, “She doesn't appreciate all the things I do for her.”

Now that you are away from the provocation, you have a choice (and it's your choice) to think about why your loved one said what he/she said. You might choose to think, "That's her disease talking," or "His medicine causes her to say these things."

Once you make this kind of choice, the cycle stops right there.

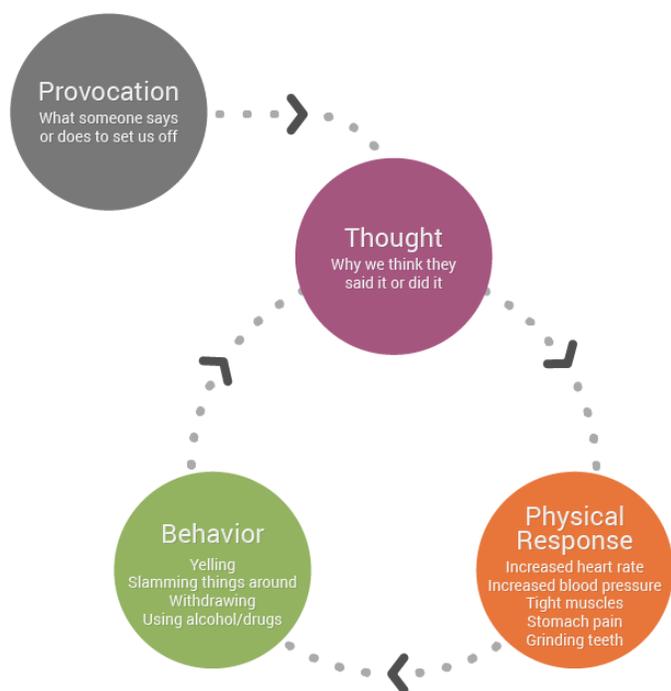
In the interest of good communication with your loved one, you might say to him/her, "That hurt my feelings. I do care about you."

What if you bypass recognizing your physical response and only realize you are stressed after you have slammed out of the room or yelled out something you wish you could take back (everybody does it)? If this happens, you can ask yourself, "What brought that on?" When you think back, you might remember having stomach pain, then yelling. Further backtracking shows you these things happened to you after your loved one said, "I don't like this soup." Then you thought, "She doesn't like anything I do." Right after that, you slammed out of the room or yelled out, "Get somebody else to make your soup!"

Could you think, "She doesn't appreciate the soup," instead of thinking, "She doesn't appreciate me"?

Here again, if you want to communicate directly with your loved one, you might say, "What would you like instead?"

The key to managing stress is to tell yourself appropriate things. Oh, yes, what you tell yourself has to be true, too. Pollyanna statements are not helpful. Reminding yourself that your loved one is hurting or taking medicine that affects his/her thinking is usually a true statement. It is also usually true when you tell yourself that everybody is tired, and that your loved one's disease has affected you all.



There are times, though, when you simply need a break. It is good to know when the symptoms of stress tell you it's time for you to take a break – for someone to stay with your loved one so you may leave for a while and refresh yourself.

A good place to start looking for these symptoms is to review your own personal stress physical reactions, either the ones listed above or a list of your own. A break won't stop stress forever, but it will help you return to your loved one with more strength to carry on.

We wish you every success in your stress management efforts. You deserve to feel better. Being a caregiver is tough work.