

As clinical psychologist, yoga instructor and TBC Mom, Christine (Citrinī) Ware, Ph.D., RYT, offers the following thoughts on adapting to change.

It is impossible to eliminate stress from our lives. Crises, such as the loss of a job or the death of a loved one, certainly impact each of us, but positive events, such as marriage, the birth of a child, or a change in jobs, also involve stress. And stress impacts your health. The Social Readjustment Rating Scale by Drs. Holmes and Rahe (1967) found a correlation between the occurrence of 41 stressful life events in people's lives and the likelihood of becoming ill. It estimates a person's stress level and its impact on health by tallying the number of "Life Change Units" (LCUs) based on the occurrence of certain events in the person's life. For example, pregnancy involves 40 LCUs, gaining a new family member involves 39 LCUs, a major change in financial state involves 38 LCUs, major changes in working hours or conditions involves 20 LCUs, major changes in types and/or amounts of recreation involves 19 LCUs, and major changes in eating habits involves 15 LCUs.

By adding up the number of LCUs for each event one is facing a score is determined. If one scores 150 or less, one has a low chance of stress-induced health difficulties. If one scores between 150 and 300 points, the odds are about 50% that one will have a *major health problem* in the next couple of years. If one scores 300 points or more, one has an 80% chance of developing a *major health problem* in the next two years. This scale makes it clear that the occurrence and number of life changes, transitions, and stressors in one's life (even, pregnancy and the birth of a child) have a substantial and cumulative effect on health.

Thankfully, such research does not predict that one will become ill; it only suggests that one is at increased risk when facing multiple and considerable life changes. Becoming aware of the impact of such transitions, crises, and situations is a useful first step in learning to cope with inevitable stress.

When transitions can be anticipated, preparing for them, minimizing other changes, and adopting stress management strategies may help to manage stress levels and preempt other difficulties. If possible, it may be wise to postpone other transitions (e.g., changing jobs) if one has experienced some of the highest scoring crises (e.g., death of a spouse, divorce).

When stressed, it is often tempting to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as comfort eating, poor diet choices, excessive TV watching or sleeping, or even drug or excessive alcohol use. Unfortunately, such short-term stress management choices often exacerbate the effects of stress on physical health, not to mention the effects on psychological health and relationships. Since stress cannot be eliminated from one's life, seek to promote long-term health by adopting healthy behaviors and stress management strategies, such as

- exercising regularly
- eating healthy, balanced meals
- getting enough sleep
- practicing relaxation techniques (meditation, yoga, self-hypnosis, imagery)
- taking breaks
- simplifying; reducing how much you take on
- prioritizing (by delaying or declining less important tasks); delegating
- obtaining support and help from friends and family
- hiring professional help (e.g., cleaners, nannies, mother's helpers, psychotherapists, massage therapists, repair professionals)

Reduce stress by focusing on simple, sustainable changes and changing only one behavior at a time.

It's also helpful to be aware of how much change affects our feelings and thoughts. Reflect on your current experience, as well as how you generally deal with stress. *Learn to recognize how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors change due to stress, as well as the*

triggers for such changes. Learn how to identify distortions in your thinking, challenge negative or self-defeating attitudes, and accept what you cannot change. Put things in perspective. Consider that changes in roles and life situations can significantly impact one's sense of self and competency. Since such psychological effects are often complex, partially outside of awareness, or difficult to share with loved ones, psychotherapists can support you as you explore and become aware of them, learn to identify problematic thought patterns, process feelings that arise during these times of transition, problem-solve, work to change behaviors, and adapt to changing circumstances.

Christine (Citrinī) Ware, Ph.D., RYT-500 is a licensed clinical psychologist who works with adults, children, adolescents, families, and couples at Mind-Body Services in Havertown, PA. She is also a certified Kali Ray TriYoga® instructor and director of the TriYoga Center of Philadelphia. For more information, visit www.mindbodyservices.com or contact her at citrini@mindbodyservices.com or 610-664-6446.

Reference:
Holmes T.H. & Rahe R.H. (1967). The Social Readjustment Rating Scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11(2), 213-8.

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