



## ***SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS***

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

### **Leader Training Guide**

#### **Strategies for Relieving Stress**

##### **Objectives:**

- Participants will be able to define stress (negative and positive).
- Participants will be able to list how stress affects the body.
- Participants will be able to perform techniques to help reduce stress on the body.

##### **Lesson Overview/Introduction:**

Stress is defined as the physiological demand placed on the body when one must adapt, cope or adjust (Nevid & Rathus, 2003). It can be healthful and essential in keeping an individual alert; however, intense or prolonged stress can be overwhelming on the body.

Two of the major forms of stress are acute and chronic. Acute stress, the most common form of stress, is short-term and stems from the demands and pressures of the recent past and anticipated demands and pressures of the near future. Chronic stress, a long term form of stress, derives from unending feelings of despair/hopelessness, as a result of factors such as poverty, family dysfunction, feelings of helplessness and/or traumatic early childhood experience.

Stress greatly affects your health as well. When an individual experiences stress, certain hormones are released, such as catecholamines and cortisol, the primary stress hormone (NIH, 2011).

- Long-term activation of the stress-response system can disrupt almost all of the body's processes and increase the risk for numerous health problems (Mayo Clinic Organization, 2011; NIH, 2011).
- Allostatic load is the cumulative biological burden exacted on the body through daily adaptation to physical and emotional stress. It is considered to be a risk factor for several diseases — coronary vascular disease, obesity, diabetes, depression, cognitive impairment and both inflammatory and autoimmune disorders (Djuric et al, 2010).
- Stress may prematurely age the immune system and could enhance the risk of illness as well as age-related diseases (Djuric et al, 2010; Geronimus et al, 2010).

## **Lesson:**

### **Activities to help reduce stress**

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to maintain your health and outlook can reduce or prevent these effects. The following are some tips that may help you to cope with stress:

- Seek help from a qualified mental health care provider if you are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, have suicidal thoughts, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope.
- Get proper health care for existing or new health problems.
- Stay in touch with people who can provide emotional and other support. Ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations to reduce stress due to work burdens or family issues, such as caring for a loved one.
- Recognize signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- Set priorities-decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Avoid dwelling on problems. If you can't do this on your own, seek help from a qualified mental health professional who can guide you.
- Exercise regularly-just 30 minutes per day of gentle walking can help boost mood and reduce stress.
- Schedule regular times for healthy and relaxing activities.
- Explore stress coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises.

### **Lesson Summary:**

Stress not properly dealt with can lead to serious chronic illnesses. Performing simple activities to greatly decrease the effects stress has on the body.

## Suggested Activities:

Group will perform simple yoga exercises to clear the mind and relax the body to help reduce the effects of stress.

### Toe Squat Exercise



1. Tuck your toes under your feet.
2. Lean back so your bottom is balanced on your heels.
3. Feel a stretch in the arches of the feet and the toe joints.
4. Focus on lengthening your spine so that it is straight, and bring attention to your breath.
5. Remain here for 1 minute.

### Down Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)



1. Inhale to a flat back and step back to downward dog, holding for 1 minute.
2. Let energy flow through your arms and out through the sit bones.
3. Keep your neck long and draw your shoulders away from the ears.

4. Press down through the heels as you exhale, which will help stretch the hamstrings, calves, and Achilles tendons.
5. Reach the right leg up and back and let your hip open up.

### Head to knee pose (Janushirasana)



1. Bring your left leg around and place it straight out in front of you.
2. Move the sole of your right foot to the inner left thigh.
3. Reach your arms up for one breath, and on the exhale, bring them down and grab the outer edges of the left foot.
4. Inhale, exhale and lengthen your spine.

### **Suggested Materials:**

- Yoga Mat
- Comfortable clothing

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