

STRESS AND RELAXATION

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is stress?

Stress is a bodily response to a real or imagined threat. Over time, stress may have a serious effect on the physical and emotional well being of a person.

How does stress affect your body?

Stress causes changes in your body that occur whenever you are faced with a threatening situation. Confronted by a threat – physical or emotional, real or imagined – the brain causes the nervous system to release hormones into the body. These hormones cause the following to occur:

- **↑ Metabolism**
- **↑ Heart rate**
- **↑ Blood pressure**
- **↑ Breathing rate**
- **↑ Muscle tension**

Unless measures are taken to control the body's reaction to stress, the long-term effects of the stress response may lead to permanent, harmful changes in the body.

How can I control my reaction to stress?

Relaxation refers to the physical, emotional and mental process of undoing the negative effects of stress. When you practice relaxation techniques, the body's reaction is as follows:

- **↓ Metabolism**
- **↓ Heart rate**
- **↓ Blood pressure**
- **↓ Breathing rate**
- **↓ Muscle tension**

In essence, when practiced regularly, relaxation techniques may reduce or prevent the negative effects of stress.

How can I get more information?

For more information on stress and relaxation, contact Greenwich Hospital's Integrative Medicine Program at 203-863-3615.