Diet important in fighting stress

By David Brister, Ph.D.
Director, NSB Community
Mental Health Center

Last month's column dealt with stress and some of the general ways we might go about attempting to cope with the problem. This time, we'll focus our attention a bit more sharply on just one of the many factors which significantly influence our ability to resist stress:

DIET

Since nearly all foods that are good for us taste good, we often implicitly assume that the opposite is true as well; what tastes good is probably OK to eat. But this is not always the case. Some things we eat and drink regularly, without giving them a thought, impair our ability to cope with stress.

For example coffee, tea, cola drinks, and chocolate all contain small amounts of stimulants which temporarily give us a little boost of extra energy. They help us to think more clearly and function more energetically when we are tired.

All of these substances are popular because they taste good, and also because they temporarily make us feel a little better.

Unfortunately, we sometimes use "too much of a good thing" and begin to experience the nervousness, distractability, sleeplessness, poor concentration and intolerance for stress that these stimulant-containing substances tend to cause when consumed in more than small amounts.

The thing to do, of course, is to enjoy them in moderation. But this is easier said than done. For we often gradually tend to become somewhat dependent on them with continuing use.

After a time, we sometimes discover that we just can't feel quite right without our several mugs (the bigger the better) of coffee or tea, cans of cola drink, or perhaps an occasional snarf of something chocolate to brighten up our outlook during breaks in daily activities.

And so we need to closely monitor our intake of these substances, so as not to unknowingly develop a problem, some habit that is difficult to break, and which will hamper our ability to cope with the stressors all too frequently encountered in our daily lives.