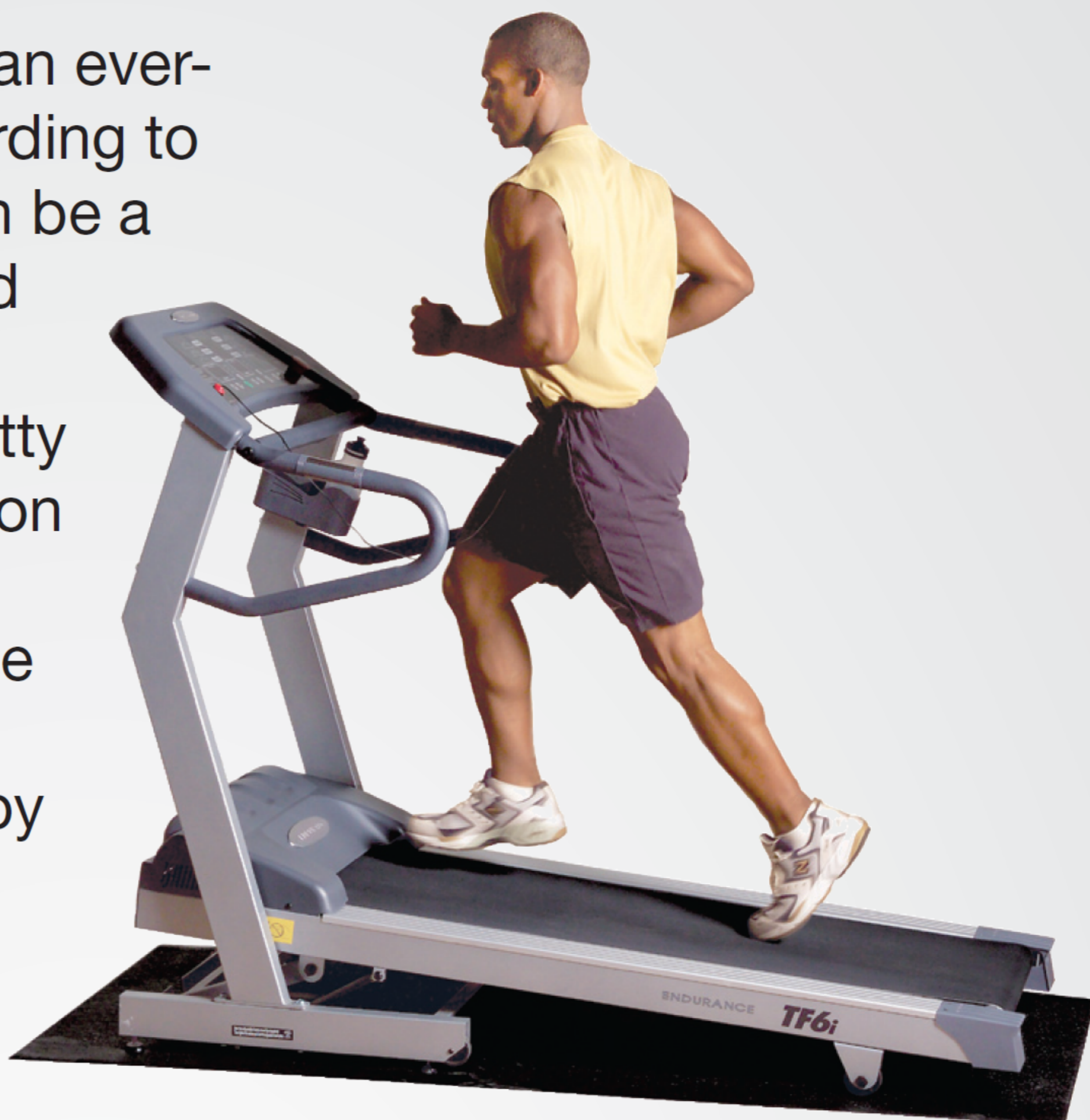


Coping With Chronic Stress

Like it or not, realize it or not, stress is an ever-present part of our modern lives. According to the FAA, a certain amount of stress can be a good thing: “it keeps a person alert and prevents complacency.” For example, dealing with an in-flight emergency pretty much complies with everyone’s definition of a stressful event, but the physiological changes we might undergo—release of chemicals like cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline—can help us cope by triggering a more-rapid heart rate and increased alertness. Such might be considered a “good” kind of stress, one the FAA recognizes in its *Risk Management Handbook* (FAA-H-8083-2): “Performance generally increases with the onset of stress, peaks, and then begins to fall off rapidly as stress levels exceed a person’s ability to cope.” Once we reach the point beyond which our performance falls off, we definitely shouldn’t be in the cockpit. The sidebar on page 23 presents some classic signs of stress. If you recognize some of them, here are some ways to minimize the impact on your flying



EXERCISE

Regular elevation of your heart rate for moderate periods helps minimize any adverse impacts of stress and usually results in better overall health.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Professional massages, yoga and meditation have been proven to reduce chronic stress and are frequently recommended by physicians.

NUTRITION

Physicians are always cautioning us to watch our diet to control weight, blood pressure and other health problems. Coping with stress is no exception. Yes, eating fruits and vegetables can help your body deal with events beyond your control.

TIME

Just as this article recommends before a flight, set aside some time each day to relax, perhaps by pursuing interests unrelated to work, family or friends. Focus on yourself.

As the *FAA Pilot’s Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge* notes, “Unrelenting psychological pressures, such as loneliness, financial worries, and relationship or work problems can produce a cumulative level of stress that exceeds a person’s ability to cope with the situation. When stress reaches these levels, performance falls off rapidly. Pilots experiencing this level of stress are not safe and should not exercise their airman privileges. Pilots who suspect they are suffering from chronic stress should consult a physician.”