

Manage Your Stress

Stress plays an important role in life. It warns you about potentially dangerous or harmful situations, motivates you to perform to the limits of your ability, and adds excitement and challenge. However, when you experience too much stress or lack good skills to cope with stress, it takes its toll both physically and emotionally. Since it is not possible to get rid of stress completely, it is important to learn to manage it, before it manages you.

Slow Down: Our society fosters the notion that we must see more, do more, and be more. Set aside some time each day for peace and serenity to reconnect with yourself and your own inner wisdom. Increase the time you allow yourself to do a particular task and reduce the number of obligations and complications in your life so you can attend to what is really important to you.

Be Aware: When you are going in several different directions at once, you become less efficient, less effective, and more stressed. Additionally, many of life's small pleasures will pass you by unnoticed. Instead, be present — totally aware and focused on the moment and on one task at a time. You will not only get more from each moment but by selecting something to be aware of, you are also not focusing on something else.

Manage Your Time Wisely: Regularly write down a list of things to do; by writing it down, you don't have to keep thinking about it so you won't forget it. But more importantly, prioritize what needs to be accomplished. There is always more to do than time to do it, so rather than getting stressed out over what

is left, make sure you complete the most important tasks first. Don't waste time on "fake relaxation" like watching TV; instead use that time for physical activity relaxation techniques, or connecting with loved ones. You will feel better and less stressed out!

Know Your Limits: Sometimes reducing stress means learning to say no, scaling back your responsibilities, and doing less. As they say, you are a human being, not a human doing!

Express Your Feelings: Keeping things bottled up inside is a major source of stress for many people. Say what's on your mind in a direct, non-threatening way. Use "I statements" like "I feel angry when..." and "I am upset that...". Communicate your desire for change in specific, positive terms. If you have trouble with this, try writing it down in a journal or letter, talking to a trusted friend, or talking to a counselor or psychologist to help you develop these important skills.

Take Care of Yourself: Not only can stress make us ill but we are less able to handle stress when we are not healthy. See your family physician regularly, eat healthfully, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.

Physical Activity: You knew this was coming! Physical activity is a powerful stress reducer. Remember the stress chemicals we talked about earlier? They are significantly reduced by exercise. In addition, setting aside time to focus on your body (for instance, while walking, lifting weights or dancing) or on your thoughts is very therapeutic as well.



Have Fun: Playtime is very important yet often overlooked when you are busy. It is often the first to go when things get stressful yet is a great stress reliever. Rent a funny movie, have a picnic, run around with your children or grandchildren, take a mini-vacation, or just play games.



Relaxation Techniques

Since stress is a natural part of your existence, learning specific techniques to help you relax will help prevent its potentially harmful effects. Like any important skill, relaxation techniques take practice. Set aside some time each day, perhaps before you go to sleep at night or during a break at work, to develop this skill. You can use it often to help you de-stress, anytime, anyplace.

Simple Stillness

Try the simple act of being still and quiet. Allowing yourself to turn inward and listening to your own thoughts can sometimes bring about the most relaxed state of all! Giving yourself a small block of time each day for relaxation will have long-lasting benefits.

Deep Breathing

Lie down or sit in a comfortable chair, preferably in a quiet place, free from distractions. Close your eyes and notice your breath. Is it shallow and just at the top of your lungs?

- Now, slowly take a deep breath, following the air with your attention as it goes in.
- Exhale slowly, taking twice as long to exhale as it took to inhale.
- Every time you exhale, pause for a second to stay conscious of your breathing. Let your shoulders droop and feel yourself relax more with each breath.
- Repeat this several times. Try breathing in through your nose, out through your mouth. Count slowly to 5 as you inhale, 10 as you exhale.
- Now notice whether your abdomen is expanding with each breath. Practice deep abdominal breathing to help you relax further.
- After 5 to 10 minutes, take a deep breath and hold it. Slowly open your eyes and slowly exhale. You should feel more relaxed and comfortable.
- With practice, even a few of these deep-breathing exercises will allow you to quickly enter a state of relaxation.

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