

## Tips to Manage Your Stress



### Identify the Causes of Stress

Stress management begins with identifying what is stressing you out. While it's easy to identify major stressors such as changing jobs, moving, or going through a divorce, it can be difficult to pinpoint the cause of chronic stress. It's easy to overlook your thoughts and feelings, but when identifying the causes of chronic stress, you must take a deeper look into why these stressors are occurring.

To identify a chronic stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:

- Do claim your stress to be temporary?
- Do you define stress as an integral part of your home, work, or personality?
- Do you blame your stress on other people, outside events, or view it as normal?

## **Keep a Stress Journal**

A stress journal not only helps identify your stressors, but also allows you to freely express the things that are stressing you. You will also notice themes and patterns to your stress, which can help you learn more about yourself and what types of challenges you tend to stress more about.

You can make note of:

- What caused your stress (make a guess if you're unsure).
- How the stress made you feel, both physically and emotionally.
- How you acted in response to the stress.
- What you did to make yourself feel better.

## **Replace Unhealthy Coping Strategies with Healthy Ones**

Are you coping with your stress in healthy or unhealthy ways? Many of us cope with our stress in ways that make us feel better temporarily, but usually end up making our stress worse. Think about the ways that you cope. A stress journal can also help identify the ways that you manage your stress.

Unhealthy ways of dealing with stress:

- Using alcohol or drugs
- Binge eating junk or comfort food
- Zoning out for hours on your phone, tablet, or TV
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and social activities
- Sleeping too much
- Making yourself busy to avoid the problem
- Taking out your stress on others
- Procrastinating

## Practice the 4 As of Stress Management

### *Avoid unnecessary stress*

Not all stress can be avoided, but it can be beneficial to get rid of the stress that is not needed in your life. Here are some ways to avoid unneeded stressors:

- **Learn how to say “no”:** Know your limits and stick to them. Whether this be a personal or professional task, if you take on more than you can handle then you will be more stressed than you need to be.
- **Avoid people who stress you out:** If someone is consistently bringing stress to your life, limit the number of times you see them and evaluate if it is worth your happiness to be in a relationship with that person.
- **Take control of your environment:** Change your routine to make it less stressful for you. For example, if grocery shopping stresses you out, then do your shopping online.
- **Avoid controversial topics:** If you get upset about religion or politics, then stop allowing those topics in conversations. You can simply excuse yourself from the conversation or ask others to speak about something else.
- **Shrink your to-do list:** Analyze your schedule and responsibilities. You know which responsibilities are most important, so include those on your to-do lists. The items that are not important, leave them off of your to-do list. This will give you more time to relax.

### *Alter the situation*

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Here are some ways you can alter a situation:

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up:** If something is bothering you, communicate your concerns in a respectful way. If you don't communicate your feelings, there is a chance that you may resent the person that your feelings are associated with.
- **Be willing to compromise:** If you are asking someone to change their behavior, be sure that you will be willing to change yours as well. If you both are willing to compromise, chances are that you will find a middle ground.
- **Be more assertive:** Take control of your life and deal with problems head on. If you see a situation arise, take precautions to handle the situation before it becomes something larger than anticipated. This also means setting boundaries with those around you. If you are satisfied with your accomplishments, chances are that you are going to be less stressed.

- **Find balance:** Work-life balance can be difficult to obtain, but it's important to try to balance these activities. Find time to still enjoy hanging out with your friends and family, as well as having your alone time.

### *Adapt to the Situation*

If you can't change the situation, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude. Here are some ways you can learn to adapt:

- **Reframe problems:** Try to change the way that you look at situations. Sometimes acknowledging the smallest positives in a bad situation will help change your attitude towards it.
- **Look at the big picture:** Try to take a different perspective of a stressful situation. Ask yourself how important this challenge will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month or a year? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your standards:** Don't set yourself up for perfectionism. Trying to be perfect will only make you more stressed. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others and learn to be okay with what happens.
- **Practice gratitude:** When you are having a hard time functioning from stress, try to remember the positives in your life. This will help you appreciate things when you are in doubt.

### *Accept the Things You Can't Change*

Some forms of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors of death of a loved one, serious illnesses, or national crises. The best case is to accept things as they are. This can be difficult, but it can bring you peace of mind as you continue through your days. You can try looking at the positives, forgiving others, and sharing your feelings with someone you trust.

## **Move More During Your Day**

Research has proven that physical activity can be a huge stress reliever. Exercise releases endorphins that make you feel good and can also work as a distraction from your daily stressors. While you get the most benefit from exercising for at least 30 minutes per day, it's okay to work up to your fitness level gradually. The first step is to get yourself up and moving.

Here are some ways to incorporate physical activity into your day:

- Put on some music and dance
- Take your dog for a walk
- Walk or cycle to the grocery store
- Use the stairs at home and work rather than using the elevator
- Park car in the farthest parking spot and walk the rest of the way
- Have a workout partner for encouragement
- Take your kids to the park

## **Learn to Manage Your Time Better**

Poor time management can bring on a lot of stress. If you stretch yourself too thin, it can be difficult to stay calm and focused. Plus, you'll be tempted to stray away from the healthy ways to handle your stress.

Here are some ways to manage your time better:

- Prioritize tasks
- Don't over-commit yourself
- Break projects into small steps
- Delegate responsibility

## **Surround Yourself with People that Make You Feel Good**

It can be calming to spend quality time with another person. Face-to-face interactions trigger an array of hormones that counteract the body's flight response. It is a natural stress reliever to spend time with others. So, make an effort to connect regularly with family and friends.

Spending time with others allows you to speak about your feelings with those that you trust. This may not fix your problems, but it does always help to talk about your problems. They may have advice or a different perspective that you can look at. The people that you trust will be flattered that you came to them and will strengthen your bond.

Not only does this allow you to speak about your feelings, but it also allows you to have a good laugh. It is proven that laughter can help relieve those stressors, so spending time with others, whom company you enjoy, can help boost your mood.

## **Make Time for Fun and Relaxation**

You can reduce your stress by having some alone time. Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle that you lose sight of yourself. You may wonder if you have time to fit in alone time in your schedule but try to make it an effort. Continue to engage in activities that you enjoy. Nurturing yourself is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

## **Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle**

It has been proven that living a healthy life can help reduce your stress and increase your happiness. Take time to take care of yourself.

Here are some ways to live a healthy lifestyle:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Reduce caffeine and sugar
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs
- Get enough sleep

## **Overview**

Life can be stressful and trying to adjust to handle these stressors can also be stressful. Remember to be kind to yourself. One single adjustment can help you immensely. While it may seem like there is nothing you can do about the stress in your life, there are healthy ways you can relieve stress and regain control. If your stress becomes too hard to handle, never hesitate to ask for help from a professional.