

EDUCATION

Managing Your Stress in Rehabilitation



Allina Health

How to Manage Stress

Stress is your body's fight-or-flight response. You may feel extra energy surge through your body if you are in an emergency situation. You may also feel this energy if you are worried or anxious.

Stress can be found in many places: home, work, school, family or traffic. Stress can give you health problems or make an existing problem worse.

Death, divorce, marriage, job loss or change, financial problems, family illness, moving or having a baby can cause high levels of stress.

So, too, can the little, aggravating situations of everyday life: standing in a long line at the grocery store with a fussy child, getting stuck in traffic or being bogged down at work while facing a deadline.

How you handle stress will have an effect on your body and emotional well-being. Stress can cause health problems if you don't learn how to deal with it.

When feeling stressed, your body can release hormones (natural chemicals from your body) that can cause physical changes. Some examples of these physical changes:

- increased pulse (blood flow)
- increased blood pressure
- body sweat
- clammy hands
- raised cholesterol.

The physical changes that stress causes will return to normal after the stress is removed. By learning how to manage your stress you can also learn how to manage these physical changes.

Signs of Stress

People react to stress in different ways. Every person may show different signs of stress or may react to stress in different ways. Here are some general signs of stress:

- constant fatigue (feeling tired)
- a change in eating habits
- an increase in the use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs
- a change in normal bowel or bladder habits
- aches or pains not caused by exercise.
- a change in normal sleep patterns
- emotional upsets (anger, anxiety, depression).

How to Manage Stress

When you are under stress, you need to take good care of yourself. There are many ways for you to cope with stress. The following are some examples:

- Eat well-balanced meals. You may have little time to grab a healthy lunch, but don't go for foods high in calories, cholesterol, or fat. Instead, pack a peanut butter sandwich, fruit and a cookie. Avoid caffeine drinks such as coffee or cola. Instead, drink at least 8 glasses of water each day.
- Try to stop using tobacco. Nicotine in the tobacco can make you feel relaxed but it's actually making your body act as if it's under tremendous stress. When you quit using tobacco, feelings of anxiety can go down. Talk with your health care provider to learn ways to quit.
- Get plenty of rest. Your body and mind need to "re-energize" each night. In the morning, you should feel relaxed and fresh. Sleep 8 hours a night.
- Meditate to focus on something relaxing, not stressful. Think of a peaceful place and go there in your mind.

- Exercise 3 to 5 times each week to release stored-up energy. You don't need to do heavy work-outs at a gym. Go for walk, bike rides, swim, join a dance class or do stretching exercises. You may even lose a pound or two.
- Ask for help if you can't handle your work load or home duties. There's no shame in admitting you need help.
- Don't worry about things you can't change.
- Write down what causes you stress. Also write down how you handle each situation.
- Avoid as much stress as you can. Try not to drive in rush-hour traffic and avoid situations that make you feel anxious or emotionally drained.

Tense-and-Release Relaxation Exercises

There are many activities that you can do to help reduce your stress and handle your stress in a healthful way. These tense-and-release relaxation exercises can help calm your mind and body in stressful situations.

- Find a comfortable position on the floor. Use pillows to support your head and legs.
- Keep all of your joints flexed and supported.
- Do not rest one body part on another.
- Take a deep breath and relax.
- Contract the muscles of your forehead. Release.
- Focus your eyes. Release.
- Clench your teeth. Release.
- Contract your jaw. Release.
- Draw your shoulders up toward your ears. Release.
- Make fists and straighten your elbows. Release.
- Take a deep breath, expand your chest and hold. Release.


- Tighten your abdominal muscles. Release.
- Squeeze your buttocks together. Release.
- Tighten your pelvic muscles. Release.
- Tighten your thighs. Release.
- Tighten your calves. Release.
- Point your toes toward your nose. Release.
- Contract everything. Release.
- Let your entire body relax.
- Breathe deeply in a rhythm.
- Rest this way for a few minutes.
- Get up slowly and gently.

Stress Reducers

There are several things you can do to help reduce or manage your stress. You can use the following tips to help make your life less stressful:

Take Care of Yourself

1. Get ready for your morning before you go to bed.
2. Take a break. If you're stuck in a stressful situation, take a few minutes alone to sit, breathe and consider. What must be done now? Things will look clearer in a few minutes.
3. Ask your health care team questions.
4. Get plenty of sleep.
5. Eliminate chores that aren't needed. Leave your bed unmade or let the dishes air dry. Use your energy to do something you want to do, instead of things you feel you have to do.

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6. Talk about your feelings and emotions with a friend or family member.
 7. Be organized.
 8. “Unplug” from the world by turning off your phone, computer and television.
 9. Recognize your limits and just say “no.”
 10. Simplify your life. Buy clothing that is easy to care for so you won’t have to iron and hand wash items.
Try a low-maintenance hairstyle.


Be Kind to Yourself

1. Make your health your No. 1 priority.
2. Take time just for yourself.
3. Save enough energy to do something you love each day.
4. Learn to let go. Forget about trying to be “perfect.”
5. Forgive yourself.
6. Practice self-love and don’t criticize yourself.
7. Stop worrying about things that you cannot control.
8. Stop rethinking the past or overthinking the future, live in the present.
9. Evaluate your priorities. What do you have to do, and what do you want to do? If you never seem to have time for the things you enjoy, maybe you need to re-evaluate priorities.
10. Remember that it is OK to not feel 100 percent all the time, give yourself a break.





Notes or Questions



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