

How To Manage Stress

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 about something.

Situations that trigger stress can be found in many places: home, work, school, family, friends or traffic. Time demands and pressures will take a toll on you physically and emotionally. 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 do not learn how to deal with it.

Signs of Stress

People react to stress in different ways. There are some general signs of stress:

- constant tiredness (fatigue)
- a change in eating habits
- an increase in the use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs

- a change in your usual bowel or bladder habits
- aches or pains not caused by exercise.
- a change in your usual sleep patterns
- emotional upsets (anger, anxiety, depression).

How to Manage Stress

When you are under stress, you need to take good care of yourself.

- Eat well-balanced meals. You may have little time to grab a healthful lunch, but do not go for high-calorie, high-cholesterol fat food. Instead, pack a peanut butter sandwich, fruit and a cookie. Avoid caffeine beverages such as coffee or cola. Instead, drink at least eight glasses of water each day.
- Do not smoke or chew smokeless tobacco. The harmful effects of tobacco will do your body no good.
- Get plenty of rest. Your body and mind need to "reenergize" each night. In the morning, you should feel relaxed and fresh. Get enough sleep to feel rested and refreshed each morning.
- Do some type of physical activity each day. You do not need to do heavy workouts at a gym. Go for a walk or bike ride, swim, join a dance class or do stretching exercises.
- Meditate to focus on something relaxing, not stressful. Think of a peaceful place and go there in your mind.

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- Ask for help if you cannot handle your work load or home duties. There is no shame in admitting you need help.
- Let go of the things you cannot 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.
- Schedule things you enjoy (taking a bubble bath, visiting or calling a friend, reading or watching sports).
- Take a break. Sit back and take a few deep breaths. Think through your situation.
- Do relaxation exercises.

Tense-and-Release Relaxation Exercises

- 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.
- Tighten the muscles of your forehead. Release.
- Focus your eyes. Release.
- Clench your teeth. Release.
- Tighten 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.
- Tighten everything. Release.
- Let your entire body relax.
- Breathe deeply in a rhythm.
- Rest this way for a few minutes.
- Get up slowly and gently.