

# Coping with Stress: Management and Reduction Techniques



Stress management and reduction techniques begin with becoming aware of your stressors, recognizing what you can change, and learning to moderate your emotional and physical reactions to your stressors.

## What is stress management?

Stress is a normal occurrence that often arises when you perceive a situation as threatening or when you are dealing with an unusually large number of everyday responsibilities. With the intense demands of home and work life, many people are experiencing intense stress. Stress in one setting can affect stress levels in the other. According to The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), early warning signs of job stress include:

- headache
- sleep disturbances
- difficulty in concentrating
- short temper
- upset stomach
- job dissatisfaction
- low morale

If you have noticed these symptoms, you may be experiencing stress in response to situations such as a huge amount of work, not enough sleep, or information overload. You may be carrying stress over from your personal life, or you may find that your home life is suffering as a result of your job stress. You need to make adjustments to counter the effects of pressures like these.

The aim of stress management is to help you balance the various aspects of your life—your work, your relationships and your leisure—and to balance the physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of life. People who effectively manage stress consider life a

challenge rather than a series of irritations, and they feel they have control over their lives, even in the face of setbacks.

### **What can you do to reduce stress?**

If you feel that you are suffering from stress, try to identify the aspects of your life that are causing it. Sometimes you may not be able to change or avoid them, but at other times simple lifestyle adjustments can make all the difference.

#### **Identifying the sources of your stress**

Knowing what causes stress for you can help you cope with it better and provide mental and emotional relief. There are many ways to plan for and avert stress. Recognizing your specific triggers is one of the first steps in the process of stress management. Common causes of stress include:

- work
- family
- health concerns
- unrealistic expectations
- cynical and negative attitudes (thinking that things are always going to go badly or end badly)
- sudden traumatic events

#### **Living a more balanced life**

You may be experiencing stress because your life has become out of balance. You may be spending too much time and energy on work or on caring for others at the expense of your own health and well-being. The following strategies can help you to live a more balanced and stress-free life:

- delegating or sharing your responsibilities at work and at home
- avoiding difficult colleagues, family members, and acquaintances
- learning to be more assertive
- doing regular exercise
- not using drink or drugs to cope
- eating a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- finding humor or absurdity in stressful situations
- never taking on more than you know you can cope with
- organizing your time better to get as much done as possible
- talking to friends or family and sharing your thoughts and fears
- listening to music or relaxation tapes
- tensing and then relaxing your muscles, starting at the toes and working up to the head and neck

#### **Managing time and scheduling**

It may also be necessary to reorganize your schedule in order to maintain a more balanced life. Some strategies for time management include:

- Make a "to-do" list. Check items off as you complete them.

- Prioritize tasks and then work on the most important ones.
- Learn to say “no.”
- Delegate less important tasks.
- Schedule extra time for tasks, in case of interruptions.
- Take frequent breaks and schedule time for relaxation.

### **Accepting support from others**

One of the most effective things we can do when we are stressed is to talk from our heart to a friendly listener who remains calm and listens in a way that makes us feel understood. Studies show that people who are active socially are most capable of dealing with stressful situations and major illnesses. For more information on how to create strong and supportive love relationships, see Helpguide's [Building and Preserving Joy and Excitement in Adult Relationships](#) eBook.

To help reduce stress, develop a network of friends and family members to turn to when stress threatens to overwhelm you. If you are a naturally private or independent person, it might seem challenging to build a support system. In order to cultivate a circle of friends, you need to take the first step. Your efforts to create a strong social network will serve you well when you are confronted with serious stress.

- Think of individuals who care about you and with whom you can share your most personal thoughts.
- Reach out to the people you feel close to. Call them; make dates to see them; be open and available to them. Let them love you.
- Be sure to include some people at least a generation younger than you so that you won't outlive your buddies and be left alone.
- Build relationships based on emotional honesty. Members of your inner circle should know how to listen without judging you, giving advice, or comparing your experiences to theirs.

### **Developing coping skills for stress relief**

Your attitude has a lot to do with whether events and occurrences produce a feeling of stress. Once you admit that you are not able to control everything, you will be better equipped to handle unexpected situations. Stress management comes down to finding ways to change your thinking and manage your expectations.

Other important ways to adjust your attitude include:

- Be realistic. Shed the Superman/Superwoman image. Don't expect too much of yourself or others. Nobody's perfect!
- Try to be assertive rather than passive or aggressive.
- Be flexible. Give in sometimes.
- Rehearse/prepare for presentations and interviews.
- Think positively. Look at each stressful situation as an opportunity to improve your life.
- Don't take work problems home or home problems to work.
- Rely on humor to relieve tension.

### **Organizing and simplifying your life**

If one of your main sources of stress is the sheer number of things that need to be done, getting organized should help you feel more at peace. A good sense of organization will also make you more efficient. Simplifying your life also should help you feel less overwhelmed.

- Plan your day.
- Learn to prioritize. Do what is most important first and realize that some things can wait until later.
- Cut out some activities and delegate tasks.
- Break large demands into small, manageable parts.
- Work through your tasks one by one.
- Organize your home and workspace so that you know where things are.
- Keep your personal belongings in working order to prevent untimely, stressful repairs.

### **Nurturing yourself**

Taking care of your body, mind and spirit can help reduce feelings of anxiety and frustration that often accompany stress. You might be surprised by how much stress relief a long bubble bath or a quick catnap will provide.

- Practice relaxation techniques such as controlling your breathing, clearing your mind, and relaxing your muscles.
- Get enough sleep. See Helpguide's [Getting the Sleep You Need: Sleep Stages, Sleep Tips and Aids](#).
- Eat a nutritious breakfast and lunch. See Helpguide's [Healthy Diet / Healthy Eating](#).
- Exercise. It relieves tension and provides a timeout from stressful situations.
- Reduce or eliminate caffeine (coffee, black and green tea, cola drinks, and chocolate). Because caffeine is a stimulant, it can make you feel more anxious.
- Avoid or reduce intake of alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs.
- Get a massage to relieve tension.
- Read a good book or see an upbeat movie.
- Consider getting a pet. A pet's love is unconditional. See Helpguide's [Finding a Pet: How to Choose the Right Dog or Cat](#)

### **Taking a break**

Try to take time everyday to slow down and do something you enjoy, even if it is just for a few minutes. Reading a magazine, playing with your dog, reading your child a book, or any other activity that helps you forget the stresses of your day can calm you and help you remember what is important.

- Stop for several mini-breaks during your workday. Take 30 seconds to look out the window or stretch.
- Set aside some personal time, but limit time spent with negative people. Go for a walk. Listen to music. Socialize. Indulge in sports and recreation.

- Take some time off to rejuvenate yourself—even if it's just one day midweek or a long weekend. If possible, go on vacation.
- Do volunteer work or start a hobby.
- Soak in a hot bath.
- Pray or meditate.
- Do Yoga or Tai Chi.

### **Keeping a journal**

Writing things down has a marvelous way of putting things in perspective. Putting your worries into words may help you see that you don't really have that much to worry about, or it may help you get organized and manage your stress, rather than letting it manage you. Regardless, keeping a journal should help you identify your concerns and establish a plan for moving forward.

- List the situations that produce stress in your life (i.e., moving to a new location, work or school demands, balancing priorities, job promotion).
- Describe how you cope with each type of stressful experience.
- Evaluate your responses. Are they healthy or unhealthy, appropriate or unproductive?