
Original Article: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html>

Tips for coping with stress

Unusual levels of stress can negatively impact your ability to accomplish personal goals and maintain good health. Challenges such as resolving a family crisis or losing weight become more difficult when stressors mount. Consider the following tips to help you reduce your stress.

Identify your stress triggers

Situations that create stress — the condition we experience when demands exceed our ability to cope — are as unique as you are. Your genes, personality and life experiences all influence the stress response in your body. For example, one person may find it stressful to plan and host a holiday celebration for friends or family. Someone else might enjoy the creative aspects of hosting such an event and even find it gratifying.

Other causes of stress are obvious — you lose your job or a parent dies. But don't overlook the daily hassles and demands that also contribute to your stress level — your daily commute or having too much work to do. Over time such persistent little things can accumulate and wreak more havoc on your health than do the sudden big things. That's why it's important to recognize all of the causes. Try one or all of these techniques:

- **Keep a stress journal.** For one week, note which events and situations cause a negative physical, mental or emotional response. Record the day and time. Give a brief description of the situation. Where were you? Who was involved? What seemed to cause the stress? Also, describe your reaction. What were your physical symptoms? How did you feel? What did you say or do? Finally, on a scale of 1 (not very intense) to 5 (very intense), rate the intensity of your stress.
- **Make a list of all the demands on your time and energy for one week.** Some examples may include your job, volunteer work, driving kids to after-school activities or caring for an elderly parent. Then, on a scale of 1 (not very intense) to 5 (very intense), rate the intensity of stress that each demand causes.

Sit down and look at your stress recordings. Look closely at the events that you ranked as very stressful. Select one of them to work on using problem-solving techniques.

Improve your time management skills

Effective time management skills can help you identify goals, set priorities and minimize the stress in your life. Use these tips to improve your time management skills and lower your stress level.

- Create realistic expectations and deadlines for yourself, and set regular progress reviews.
- Throw away unimportant papers on your desk. Prepare a master list of tasks.
- Throughout the day, scan your master list and work on tasks in priority order.
- Use a planner. Store addresses and telephone numbers there. Copy tasks from your master list onto the page for the day on which you expect to do them. Evaluate and prioritize daily.
- For especially important or difficult projects, reserve an interruption-free block of time behind closed doors.

Overcome burnout

If you dread going to work or feel burned out or stressed over a period of weeks, your situation could affect your professional and personal relationships and even your livelihood. Overwhelming frustration or indifference toward your job, persistent irritability, anger, sarcasm and a quickness to argue are indicators of a condition that needs to be dealt with. Here are strategies you can use:

- **Take care of yourself.** Eat regular, balanced meals, including breakfast. Get adequate sleep and exercise.
- **Develop friendships at work and outside the office.** Sharing unsettling feelings with people you trust is the first step toward resolving them. Minimize activities with "negative" friends who only reinforce bad feelings.
- **Take time off.** Take a vacation or a long weekend. During the workday, take short breaks.
- **Set limits.**
When necessary, learn to say no in a friendly but firm manner.
- **Choose battles wisely.** Don't rush to argue every time someone disagrees with you. Keep a cool head, and save your argument for things that really matter. Better yet, try not to argue at all.
- **Have an outlet.** Read, enjoy a hobby, exercise or get involved in some other activity that is relaxing and gets your mind off work.
- **Seek help.**
If none of these things relieves your feelings of stress or burnout, ask a health care professional for advice.

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