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Self-care for Stress Relief

To feel your best, you must take care of yourself. That means eating well, exercising, keeping work and home life balanced and maintaining good relationships. There are times, however, when even these things can't prevent stress and anxiety from creeping in. That's why self-care is so important. Taking a small amount of time out of your busy schedule just for yourself is key to handling all your duties while getting the most out of life. Try these other tips to give yourself the attention you need to be your best.

- **Exercise.** Physical exertion is a great way to relieve or reduce stress, so try exercising a little before you start work. Put in some time on the treadmill or sign up for a morning spin class.
- **Take a vacation.** How long has it been since you were away from the office for more than a three-day weekend? There is a reason you get vacation days every year, and that is so you can take an actual vacation where you are not checking your email or voicemail every two hours for messages. Go someplace, leave your work behind and spend time doing things for yourself, not for your employer.
- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep affects your immune system and your judgment and makes you more likely to snap over minor irritations. Most people need seven to eight hours a day.
- **Stretching.** Stress often appears as tension in our necks, shoulders and head. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times a day can have positive effects.
- **Be positive.** Our thought patterns often cause or contribute to the stress that we are feeling. The next time you encounter a stressful situation, take a moment to tune into your thoughts and feelings. Write these thoughts down and then write down a more positive replacement.

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Practical Mental Health

These days, with all that's going on in the world, it's pretty easy to start feeling down. Family conflicts, personal disappointments, or a couple of weeks of bad weather can give you the blues, during even the best of times. So when you're facing the kind of stress we're all currently under, those negative feelings can easily grow into something worse.

If any negativity you're feeling lingers for several weeks and begins to interfere with your ability to enjoy life and function effectively, seek help. A therapist can assist you in exploring your feelings.

For those simply feeling a bit blue, however, some simple, positive lifestyle changes may be all that's needed to turn things around:

Find support in others. Try confiding in trusted family members and friends about how you have been feeling. An understanding loved one can give you the strength and support you need to help cope with unhappiness.

Manage your stress. Learn effective ways to reduce your stress and anxiety, which may minimize your feelings of depression.

Exercise regularly. Regular fitness activities can improve your mood and boost your self-esteem. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that is right for you.

Eat right. Exercise discipline to not overeat. Avoid junk foods and environments that may encourage bingeing. Stick to a nutritionally balanced diet. Avoid alcohol, which is a depressant.

Get the right amount of sleep. Experts recommend at least seven to eight hours a night. Resist the urge to oversleep, and try to maintain a regular sleeping schedule.

Make more time for fun, recreational activities. Try to spend more time outdoors, especially on sunny days. Consider taking a vacation soon, perhaps to somewhere bright and warm.

Be more social. Stay in touch with friends and family. Get out more often, and participate in enjoyable activities such as attending social gatherings, going to the movies and having lunch or dinner with friends.

Educate yourself. Learn all you can about depression, support groups in your area and ways to manage your feelings.

Do not let feelings of depression and sadness control your life. Get help to manage your symptoms. Learn to feel comfortable talking about your difficult emotions. Take care of your mind and body by giving it the food, rest and activity it needs. Treat yourself to the things you enjoy more often. Focus on getting out of the funk you may be feeling and experiencing life to the fullest.

Resource

- The World Health Organization: www.who.int/topics/mental_health/en/



Steps to a Healthy Lifestyle

Many of the leading causes of disease are preventable by making healthier lifestyle choices, but living healthy is not only about preventing disease. It's also about creating balance in your physical, spiritual and emotional health.

Remember the following tips to prevent disease as well as promote balance in your life.

Balanced Diet

A balanced diet contains lean proteins, healthy fats, five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, whole grains and plenty of water. You will be healthier if you limit your intake of saturated and trans fats, sodium, refined sugars and processed foods. For the highly needed variety of nutrients and antioxidants, add lots of color to your plate in the form of fruits and vegetables. Remember to watch your portion sizes.

Exercise

Exercise can help lower cholesterol, improve blood sugars, and reduce stress levels. As a general goal, aim for at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity for overall good health. Wearing a pedometer is a great way to assess how much activity you are really getting.

Rest and Sleep

Being rested allows you to have better control over your diet, resulting in better choices along with fewer cravings for sugar and caffeine. In addition, while you sleep, the immune system strengthens and your body fights infections and disease. For health benefits, get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.

Stress Management

Stress management can help improve sleep, blood pressure and overall quality of life. A positive attitude alone has shown to improve stress levels. Yoga, prayer, meditation, journaling, reading, exercising, deep breathing and bubble baths are healthy ways to manage your stress.

Eliminate Addictions

Quitting smoking has one of the biggest impacts on health. Other addictions such as alcohol, drugs, caffeine and sugar also pose threats to your health. Reducing these substances can improve health and reduce stress and anxiety levels..



Are you stressed?

Prolonged stress can have adverse effects on your health and general well-being.

Conditions linked to stress include:

- Migraines and headaches
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Diabetes
- Asthma

Behavioral symptoms include:

- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Forgetfulness
- Lack of concentration
- Substance abuse

8 Tips for Beating Stress

Laugh and learn

Instead of getting irritated, laugh at life's annoyances and learn from your mistakes.

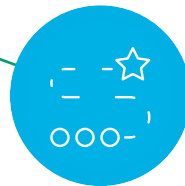


Identify the causes

Is it traffic? Problems at work? Bad news on the TV? What stresses you out?

Keep a schedule

Allow ample time for travel and schedule free time for yourself.



Focus on the positive

Be proud of your accomplishments and celebrate your successes.

Get enough sleep and exercise

Exercise not only improves health and mood, it aids in better sleep.

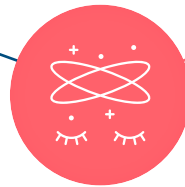


Do things you enjoy

Make and take time to do activities that bring you pleasure.

Meditate

By sitting in a quiet environment and closing your eyes you can achieve relaxation.



Nurture relationships

More interpersonal contact with the right people can help relieve stress.



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How resilient are you?

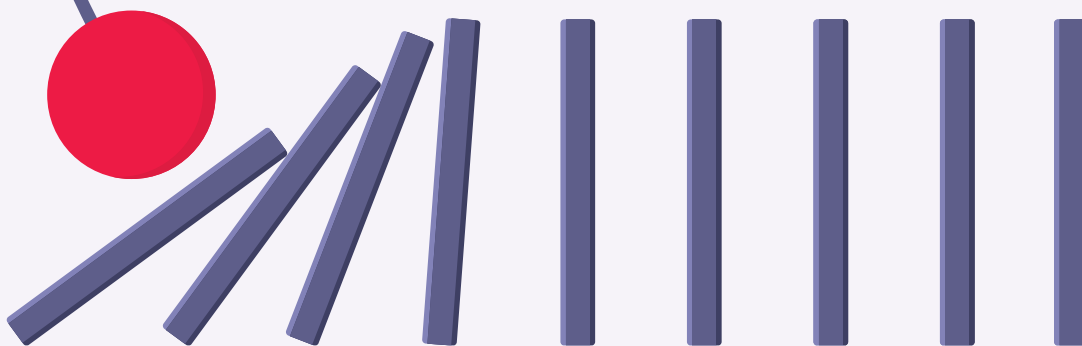
What is resilience?

The ability to confront crises and difficult situations without getting overwhelmed by them. Being resilient can help protect you from:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Health Issues

5 Tips for Building Resilience

- **Maintain strong connections with family and friends.** Having strong, positive relationships with others provides a cushion of acceptance and support that can help you weather tough times.
- **Avoid viewing problems as insurmountable.** Learn from past experiences and be confident that you will get through a current crisis, too.
- **Accept that change is part of living.** The reality is that certain things cannot be controlled. Accepting change makes it easier to move forward with your life.
- **Keep a long-term perspective and hopeful outlook.** Set goals for yourself so that you can feel productive and purposeful every day, and create longer-term goals so that you have a direction for your future.
- **Take care of your physical and mental health.** It's especially important when you are feeling stressed to continue to eat a healthy diet and get adequate sleep and regular exercise.



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Keeping Stress Levels in Check

Resiliency and stress are intertwined. The more resilient we are, the better able we are to deal with stress, but the more stressed we are, the less resilient we become. That's why keeping stress levels in check is key to building and maintaining our resilience.

Here are a few tips for managing stress:

- ✓ **Get enough rest.** Doctors recommend seven to eight hours of sleep a night for adults.
- ✓ **Exercise regularly.** Swimming, running, brisk walking, aerobic exercises and other repetitive fitness activities are especially beneficial. Experts recommend exercising at least 20 to 30 minutes three to five times a week.
- ✓ **Engage in fulfilling activities.** Take a little time each day for something you like to do: a hobby, a walk with your partner, an hour with a good book or a home-improvement project.
- ✓ **Avoid caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants.** These common drugs can induce stress and anxiety. A simple step like switching to decaffeinated coffee can have a real effect on your stress level.
- ✓ **Avoid alcohol, tranquilizers and recreational drugs.** These may contribute to anxiety and depression and an increased sense of loss of control.



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