



Stress: You Can Manage it!

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. When you sense danger—whether it’s real or imagined—the body’s defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction, or the stress response.

The stress response is the body’s way of protecting you. When working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life—giving you extra strength to defend yourself, for example, or spurring you to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident.

The stress response also helps you rise to meet challenges. Stress is what keeps you on your toes during a presentation at work, sharpens your concentration when you’re attempting the game-winning free throw, or drives you to study for an exam when you’d rather be watching TV.

But beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships, and your quality of life.

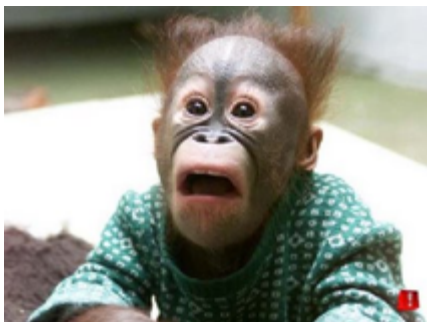
Symptoms of Stress

Common reactions to a stressful event include:

Physical or emotional tension are often signs of stress.

They can be reactions to a situation that causes you to feel threatened or anxious. Stress can be positive (such as planning your wedding) or negative (such as dealing with the effects of a natural disaster).

- Tension and irritability
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Difficulty making decisions
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Loss of appetite
- Nightmares and recurring thoughts about the event
- Anger
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Sadness and other symptoms of depression
- Feeling powerless
- Crying
- Sleep problems
- Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems
- Trouble concentrating



Tips for Self-Care

The best ways to manage stress in hard times are through self-care:

- Avoid drugs and alcohol. They may seem to be a temporary fix to feel better, but in the long run they can create more problems and add to your stress—instead of take it away.
- Find support. Seek help from a partner, family member, friend, counselor, doctor, or clergy person. Having a sympathetic, listening ear and sharing about your problems and stress really can lighten the burden.
- Connect socially. After a stressful event, it is easy isolate yourself. Make sure that you are spending time with loved ones. Consider planning fun activities with your partner, children, or friends.
- Take care of yourself.
 - ❖ Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet
 - ❖ Exercise regularly
 - ❖ Get plenty of sleep
 - ❖ Give yourself a break if you feel stressed out—for example, treat yourself to a therapeutic massage
 - ❖ Maintain a normal routine
- Stay active. You can take your mind off your problems by giving—helping a neighbor, volunteering in the community, even taking the dog on a long walk. These can be positive ways to channel your feelings.





RELAXATION

How you react to stress may influence the relaxation technique that works best for you:

How do you react to stress?

Do you tend to become angry, agitated, or keyed up?

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that quiet you down, such as meditation, deep breathing, or guided imagery

Do you tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or spaced out?

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that are stimulating and that energize your nervous system, such as rhythmic exercise

Do you tend to freeze-speeding up internally, while slowing down externally?

Your challenge is to identify relaxation techniques that provide both safety and stimulation to help you "reboot" your system. Techniques such as mindfulness walking or power yoga might work well for you

Breathing meditation for stress relief

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple, yet powerful, relaxation technique. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

Practicing deep breathing meditation

The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.

Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.

Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.

