

MANAGING STRESS

Stress is the body's natural response to any demand or threatening situation. In the context of health, stress is the body's reaction to various life challenges or stressors. A **stressor** can be in many different forms – physical threat, infection or illness, negative thoughts or strong emotions.

One Response. The body responds to all stressors in the same way by activating the sympathetic branch of your nervous system known as “fight or flight.” Bodies are prepared to handle **acute stress** (short term), but **chronic stress** (long term) can cause **chronic inflammation**.

Chronic inflammation can increase risk for many diseases and disorders. Chronic inflammation **links** chronic stress to chronic disease.

8 Ways to Manage and Prevent Chronic Stress

Maintain a Positive Attitude

A positive attitude is a key part of effective stress management. A positive attitude stops negative self-talk and promotes positive resolutions to stressful experiences.

Be Mindful of Your Thoughts

Mindfulness promotes self-awareness, breathing, muscle relaxation and meditation. Mindfulness helps us let go of generalized anxiety and worry.

Retrain Your Autonomic Reflex Responses

Have an expanded perspective. See the problem in a new way. Think about the choices that you have at hand regarding interpretation of stressful situations and your responses. Make a plan for when you experience stress.

Choose Healthy Foods

Eating a healthy diet can help counter the impact of stress by supporting the immune system and lowering blood pressure. Focus on consuming fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and seafood.

Participate in Moderate Exercise

Exercise reduces the body's stress hormones and stimulates endorphins that are the body's natural mood elevators. Keep it simple. Move in all the ways your body is able to move. Pick something you enjoy doing.

Get Adequate Sleep

Your body does the majority of its healing while you are asleep. Do your best to maintain a regular sleep/wake cycle by going to bed at the same time every day. Adults should get around 7-8 hours of sleep each night.

Use Your Social Circle

Connecting with your family and friends helps to give a sense of belonging and self-worth and can help you get through tough times.

Learn to Say No

Take control over the parts of your life that you can change and that are causing you stress. Being selective about what you take on and saying no to things that will unnecessarily add to your load.

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Mindfulness

The practice of being fully present and aware of your thoughts and actions. Through awareness, you learn how to not be overly reactive or overwhelmed by life's many, inevitable stressors.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness Meditation: Sit quietly and focus on your natural breathing or on a word or “mantra” that you repeat silently. Allow thoughts to come and go without judgement and return to your focus on breath or mantra.

Body Sensation: Notice subtle body sensations such as an itch or tingling without judgement and let them pass. Notice each part of your body in succession from head to toe.

Sensory: Notice sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Name them “sight”, “sound”, “smell”, “taste”, or “touch” without judgement and let them go.

Emotions: Allow emotions to be present without judgement. Practice a steady and relaxed naming of emotions: “joy”, “anger”, “frustration.” Accept the presence of the emotion without judgement and let them go.

Urge Surfing: Cope with cravings and allow them to pass. Notice how your body feels as the craving enters. Replace the wish for the craving to go away with the certain knowledge it will subside.

Mindfulness Meditation Exercise

1. Sit on a straight-backed chair or cross-legged on the floor.
2. Focus on an aspect of your breathing, such as the sensation of air flowing into your nostrils and out of your mouth, or your belly rising and falling as you inhale and exhale.
3. Once you've narrowed your concentration in this way, begin to widen your focus. Become aware of sounds, sensations and your ideas.
4. Embrace and consider each thought or sensation without judging it good or bad. If your mind starts to race, return your focus to your breathing. Then expand your awareness again.



Free Mindfulness Apps on your Phone!



Calm



Stop, Breathe, Think



Aura



Insight Timer



Headspace



iPhone Health App – Mindful Minutes

Sources: <https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm> & <https://education.seekinghealth.com/stress/>

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Self-Care & Mental Health CHALLENGE

Each day, focus on a new healthy behavior and check it off on the chart below. At the end of the month, see how far you've come towards improved mental health and a life with more self-care!

Get 7–8 hours of sleep	Try a new recipe	Go for a walk	Meditate or practice mindfulness for 5 minutes	Drink a glass of water first thing in the morning	Compliment someone
Avoid social media for the day	Watch your favorite movie	Try a new activity	Start a book or listen to a podcast	Write down 3 things you are grateful for	Catch up with an old friend
Declutter a space in your home	Complete a random act of kindness	Journal for 10 minutes	Write down 3 short-term goals	Avoid television for a day	Take a nap
Create a bucket list	Pamper yourself	Listen to music	Spend time outside in the sun	Take a bath	Have a game night
Clean out your inbox/ emails	Write down or state 3 positive affirmations to yourself	Spend quality time with a loved one	Stretch in the morning and/or before bed	Finish something you have been putting off	Exercise for 30 minutes (if able)

Always consult your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise program or diet/nutrition program. This content is for general information and education only, and is not intended to diagnose any medical condition or to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should immediately stop any exercise and consult your healthcare provider if you experience pain, nausea, dizziness, or shortness of breath. If you think you are having a medical emergency, call 911. Learn more at: myhealthonsite.com/privacy-policy.

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TIPS TO PRACTICE SELF CARE & REDUCE ANXIETY & STRESS AT HOME

Burn a Candle or Diffuse Essential Oils

Calming scents include: Lavender, Rose, Bergamot, Chamomile, Frankincense, Orange Blossom and Geranium.

Reduce Your Caffeine Intake

People's sensitivity to caffeine can vary, but generally, increased intake can cause anxiety.

Practice Gratitude

Each day take time to reflect and write down a few things you are grateful for.

Listen to Soothing Music

Slow-paced instrumental music can induce the relaxation response by helping lower blood pressure and heart rate.

Practice Deep Breathing

Deep breathing can help activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the relaxation response.

Spend Time with Your Companion

Pets provide companionship and can help to improve your mood.

Meditate and Practice Mindfulness

Free Mindfulness Apps: Headspace, Calm, Aura, Stop, Breath, Think, and Insight Timer.

Limit Time on Social Media and Watching The News

Schedule intentional breaks from social media and news outlets.

Exercise

See the At Home Exercise Guide Linked on My Health Onsite Wellness E-Newsletter.

Connect Virtually

Send a loved one a letter, Facetime with friends and family, move book clubs, small groups and gatherings to web meetings.

Check Off To-Do List

Use free time to complete projects around the house or clean out drawers and closets.



Sources: <https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/top-self-care-tips-for-being-stuck-at-home-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

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