

Ways to De-Stress

Listen to Music

Calming music has a proven positive effect on the brain and body. It can also lower blood pressure and reduce cortisol, a hormone linked to stress. Next time you are feeling stressed, put on a relaxing tune to destress or put on a happy song and dance it out!

Seek out support



If you're feeling overwhelmed, talked to someone that you trust is a great way to de-stress. Choosing to share your experience with someone can be comforting, allowing a place to vent and put everything in perspective.

Journal or Talk Yourself Through It

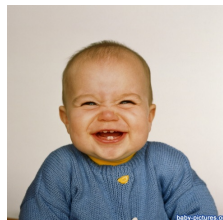
When talking to someone is not feasible or you don't want to involve other people, writing your thoughts in a journal or talking yourself through a problem or stressful situation is a great option. You may find that you have more insight into a situation than you thought, and taking a step back can help you cope.

Eat Right

When we're stressed, we tend to eat unhealthily. Some people cope by eating too much or not enough. It's important to be mindful about what you're eating to keep your body healthy in times of stress. Fruits and vegetables are always good, as is fish with high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to reduce the symptoms of stress.

Laugh it Off

Laughter releases endorphins that improve mood and decrease levels of the stress-related hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Laughing tricks our nervous system into making us feel better.



More Ways to De-Stress!

Breathe Easy/Meditate

"Taking a deep breath" can help relax us and give us a minute to pause when stressed. An easy exercise is to sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor and hands on top of your knees. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply, concentrating on your lungs as they fully expand in your chest. Deep breathing oxygenates your blood, helps center your body, and clears your mind. This is actually a simple form of meditation. Guided forms of meditation using imagery (which can be found on meditation CDs) can be particularly soothing.

Exercise/Sports

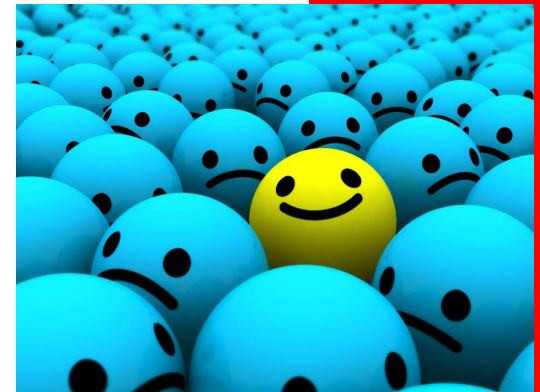
Exercise doesn't necessarily mean power lifting at the gym or training for a marathon. Playing sports, a short walk around the block, or simply taking a moment to stretch during a break at work can offer immediate relief in a stressful situation. Getting your blood moving releases endorphins, which can improve your mood.



Sleep Better

Most people know that stress can cause you to lose sleep. However, lack of sleep can be a key cause of stress and may leave you rundown. When your body is out of whack, it can make you more vulnerable to stress, inhibiting your ability to deal with stressful situations. Try to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Turn off the computer and the TV earlier – manage your time and get to bed!

Developing Positive Coping Skills

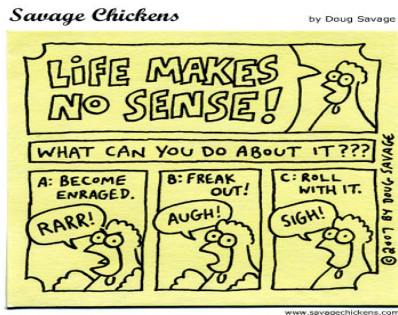


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What is Coping?

Coping refers to an individual's response to a stressful situation or issue, which is called a *stressor*, in attempts to tolerate or minimize that stress. A stressor can be positive when it is perceived as a challenge; negative when a person feels overwhelmed or ill-equipped to handle it. People cope in different ways that may include physiological, psychological, and/or behavioral responses.



TYPES OF COPING

Negative ways of coping, also known as maladaptive coping, can be recognized by their detrimental impact on your life. Typically, one will change behaviors in attempts to avoid the stress that is uncomfortable, rather than processing it. They include such things as yelling, smoking, drinking, overeating, isolating from friends and family, using drugs, and sleeping too much. Such coping methods can adversely affect relationships, health, employment, etc. In other words, they can ultimately add *more* stress.

Positive ways of coping allow you to deal with issues and problems in a satisfactory and efficient way that reduce stress and may actually enhance your overall well-being. There are two main approaches to coping:

- **Emotion-focused coping** is when people try to reduce the emotional consequences of stress.
- **Problem-focused coping** is when people try to attack the problem in order to weaken it or eliminate it altogether.

Often the two coping styles are used simultaneously: While working on the solution to a problem, strategies are employed to decrease the related stress.

Gaining Insight

In order to manage your stress, you must be able to recognize the experience and if possible, what triggered it. Common physical signs of stress include increased heart rate, headaches, stomach aches, sleeping difficulties, and chest pain. Emotional signs of stress can include depression, anxiety, low sex drive and irritability.



Triggers can be either internal or external. Internal triggers can include fears, attitudes and beliefs as well as uncertainty. External triggers could be major life changes or things in your environment, such as traffic, long waiting lines, and so on.

Many people attempt to manage external triggers by avoiding them, such as choosing to leave extremely early for work as a way of not getting caught in traffic. But because it is impossible to simply avoid triggering situations all of the time it is best to examine how these triggers impact you and learn how to let go of control. It is possible to solve a problem rather than becoming overwhelmed by it



Though many people can make some basic changes on their own, a counselor or therapist can help with both your internal triggers and the manner in which you respond to external triggers.

Problem-solving Strategies

PRIORITIZE AND ORGANIZE

When you are overwhelmed, life can start to feel unmanageable, making the smallest of tasks feel like you are climbing to an unreachable mountain top. The best way to gain control of your life—or not losing that control in the first place—is to organize and prioritize the tasks that need to be done.

A daily or weekly calendar is a great tool to see at a glance what is coming up in the next few days. This allows you to schedule time appropriately for appointments and tasks as well as time to yourself! . While it may seem easier to use your phone for this, keeping your phone charged and worrying about tasks getting deleted could lead to greater stress. Lists and check lists are other great ways of organizing tasks and ensuring that all parts of a task are completed. You can prioritize the list based on level of importance or even deadlines.



BREAK IT DOWN

Breaking up a large, daunting task into smaller manageable pieces allows you to accomplish what is needed without the fear of failing. If your home is chaotic, rather than planning to spend your entire Sunday cleaning, leaving no time for any enjoyment, make a decision to spend one hour a day cleaning. By the end of a week, two weeks, or even a month, you'll have a clean home without all the stress—and it'll be easier to maintain going forward.

TAKE A BREAK FROM TECHNOLOGY

Being constantly "plugged in" can be distracting and distressing. Multitasking is proven to be an ineffective way of approaching task completion and often leads to higher levels of stress. Allowing yourself time to breathe and focus on each individual task increases productivity and quality of the work. Limiting tech time is an easy way to improve your stress levels and reduce the need to cope.