Ways to Manage or Relieve

Stress!

It may seem that there’s nothing you can do about stress. The tests won’t stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day, there is so much to worry about, and deadlines will always be demanding. But you have more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you’re in control of your life is the foundation of stress management. Managing stress is all about taking charge: of your thoughts, emotions, schedule, and the way you deal with problems.

In general, stress is related to both external and internal factors. External factors include your work, physical environment, your relationships and all the situations, challenges, difficulties, and expectations you're confronted with daily. Internal factors determine your body's ability to respond to stress and influence your ability to handle stress. Internal factors include your nutritional status, health and fitness levels, emotional well being, your amount of sleep and rest, and your ability to manage stress through relaxation techniques or other strategies.

No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

1. **Take a walk**

Exercise is a fantastic stress reliever that can work in minutes. Taking a walk allows you to enjoy a change in scenery, which can get you into a different frame of mind, and brings the benefits of exercise as well.

1. **Journaling**

Writing once a day can help you feel focused, process negative emotions, solve problems, and increase self-awareness. Research shows that journaling decreases the symptoms of asthma and arthritis, improves cognitive functioning, and strengthens the immune system.

1. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

This is a great technique for reducing overall body tension. As you practice tensing and relaxing all the muscle groups in your body, you can rapidly relax your whole body. Here’s how to get started:

* After finding a quiet place, sit or lie down and get comfortable.
* Tense all the muscles in your face. Make a tight grimace, close your eyes as tightly as possible, clench your teeth, even move your ears up if you can. Hold this for the count of eight as you inhale.
* Now exhale and relax completely. Let your face go completely lax, as though you were sleeping. Feel the tension seep from your facial muscles, and enjoy the feeling.
* Continue down your body after relaxing your face, repeating the procedure with neck, shoulders and arms, abdomen and chest, then buttocks, legs and feet.

1. **Get Enough Sleep**

Sleep is food for the brain. During sleep, important body functions and brain activity occur. According to the National Sleep Foundation, teens need 8 ½– 9 ¼ hours of sleep every night. Not getting enough sleep can limit your ability to learn, listen, concentrate and solve problems.

1. **Eat a Balanced Breakfast**

For those of you who start the day on a bagel and coffee, *read this!* Breakfast is known as ‘the most important meal of the day’ for a very good reason: a healthy meal in the morning can balance your blood sugar levels and give you the sustenance you need to handle physical and mental stress. Without it, you will be less resilient, both physically and mentally. Be sure to have protein and fruit, not just caffeine and empty calories!

1. **Don’t Procrastinate**

Putting off a stressful or labor-intensive project can only increase the stress you experience. Procrastination is a habit that can be broken. Instead of looking at the project as one huge job, and being overwhelmed by it, break it up into smaller projects, and set deadlines for each phase

1. **Laughter**

The physical act of laughing releases tension and brings positive physiological changes. Finding ways to work more laughter into your day can be an effective route to stress relief.

1. **Controlled Breathing**

Breathing exercises provide convenient, quick, simple stress relief that can be used anytime, anywhere. Take a deep, cleansing breath, expand your belly, keep your shoulders relaxed, and hold it in for the count of six. Exhale, and repeat 2-5 more times. Then breathe normally, and focus your attention on your breathing. As you breathe, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, still expanding your belly rather than moving your shoulders up and down. If your thoughts drift toward the stresses of the day ahead or of the day behind you, gently refocus on your breathing and remain in the present moment. Feel the air move in, and feel the air move out.

1. **Make Lists**

Organize a to-do list for each day, Label your to-do list with A's, B's and C's, according to importance. If it's a hectic day, scratch the C's from your list.

1. **Play a Game**

Enjoying a good game, even if it is short, or playing something relaxing online can take your mind off of your stressors and lead to a more relaxed state.

1. **Listen to Soothing or Fun Music**

Music can compliment other healthy lifestyle habits, adding a sense of peace to a workout, putting a spring in your step on a walk, or stimulating your mind as you write in your journal.

1. **Stretch in the Shower**

The hot water will loosen up your muscles, so it’s easier to get a good stretch. The act of stretching will help to release stored tension and enable you to feel more relaxed, at peace, and ready to handle what comes your way.

1. **Talk to a Friend**

When you are under stress, ask for support, and make sure that you also give back. Schedule fun activities with your friends.

1. **It’s OK to Cry**

Crying is a natural body function that helps relieve stress, anxiety and other emotional build-ups. A study by the University of Minnesota discovered that the chemicals that build up in your body during emotional stress can be removed in your tears, and unreleased stress can increase your risk for heart attack and damage certain areas of your brain. Emotional tears have a different chemical make-up from surface or reflex ears, and include an endorphin and natural painkiller.

1. **Pray and Listen**

Talk to God, and visualize placing your troubles and worries into His hands. Sit quietly, for at least 5 minutes, and listen for His response. Find a favorite Scripture verse, and repeat it over and over.

1. **Reduce Caffeine Intake**

Consuming too much caffeine in general can make you more emotionally reactive to stress. Learn how much caffeine is too much.   
Consuming caffeine too late in the day can affect sleep quality, which impacts stress levels.

1. **Limit or Cut Back on Commitments**

Learning to say ‘no’ may be an obvious stress relief tip, but that doesn’t make it an easy one. We encounter many different worthy possibilities for our time and attention, and saying no may disappoint someone. Give yourself permission to say “no” to time demands that aren’t absolutely necessary.

1. **Guided Imagery**Guided imagery, sometimes known as "visualization," is a technique in which a person imagines pictures, sounds, smells, and other sensations associated with reaching a goal. Imagining being in a certain environment or situation can activate the senses, producing a physical or psychological effect.
2. **Keep a Gratitude Journal**

Making a daily list of things you are grateful for in a journal will help remind you of what is going well.

1. **Visit Mother Nature**

Spending time in nature focusing on simple things like birds singing can give you a refreshing perspective.

1. **Draw a picture**

Drawing can take your mind off your worries and leave you with a clearer head. There’s a certain quality of being called “flow” that refers to a state of being completely engaged in something to the point of being in a near meditative state and carries many of the [benefits of meditation](http://stress.about.com/od/tensiontamers/p/profilemeditati.htm). You can experience ‘flow’ when drawing.

1. **Eat a Balanced Diet**

A poor diet can bring greater reactivity toward stress. A healthy diet can bring greater physical *and* emotional wellness. Find some simple go-to meals and snacks, and feel less stressed in your daily life.

1. **Speak Kindly to Yourself**

Negative self-talk and criticizing yourself creates a lot of internal stress. Give yourself a break and replace the negative talk by positively acknowledging your good qualities.

**Possibilities for Dealing with Stressful Situations:**

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| --- | --- |
| **Change the situation:**   * Avoid the stressor * Alter the stressor | **Change your reaction:**   * Adapt to the stressor * Accept the stressor |