

Stress Management and Emotional Health

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Stress can take a toll on your physical and mental well-being. It's important to use stress management techniques like mindfulness, meditation, exercise, and relaxation to reduce the effects of stress on your body. If you feel anxious or overwhelmed by stress, a therapist or healthcare provider can help.

Overview

What is stress management?

Everyone experiences stress at various times in their lives. It's a normal reaction that occurs when you encounter changes or challenges (stressors). Your body responds physically and mentally to stress.

Stress management involves using techniques to improve how you respond to life stressors. These techniques can prevent or ease stress-induced symptoms.

How does stress affect your physical and mental health?

When you feel stress, you may experience:

- Anxiety, depression or panic attacks
- Chest pain or racing heart rate
- Fatigue or insomnia
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Upset stomach (indigestion)

What are the risks or complications of poorly managed stress?

People who feel overwhelmed with stress may turn to unhealthy behaviors to cope, such as:

- Alcohol use
- Eating disorders, including overeating
- Smoking
- Substance use disorders

Treatment Details

What are ways to identify stress?

The first step to relieving stress in your life is to identify stressors. Something big like a move, job change or divorce is easy to identify. But small stressors can have a big effect on your physical and mental well-being, too.

You may want to keep a journal to track your stress levels and coping mechanisms. A journal can help you identify stressors and patterns. For a week or longer, write down:

- The cause of stress
- How you feel physically and emotionally
- Your reaction to the stressor

What are ways to cope with stress?

There are lots of ways to cope with stressful situations. To get the most benefit, try to incorporate these techniques into your daily life — not just when you start having symptoms of stress. Most people find relief using a combination of methods.

Relaxation techniques:

- Laugh more: Studies show that laughing reduces the stress hormone cortisol and boosts mood. Watch a funny show or spend time with someone who makes you laugh.
- Calm your mind: Mindfulness, meditation, massage, and deep breathing exercises can lower your heart rate and help relax your mind. You can also listen to your favorite music or soothing sounds.

Physical techniques:

- Be physically active: Walking outside or exercising with friends can lift your mood. Mindful physical activities like yoga or tai chi can also help.
- Eat a healthy diet: Include more fresh fruits and vegetables. Reduce fatty foods, caffeine, and sugar.
- Improve your sleep habits: Turn off electronics before bed, create a calm environment, and unwind with a book or warm bath.
- Stop using substances: Quit smoking and cut back on alcohol. Call the SAMHSA helpline at 1.800.662.HELP (4357) for support if needed.

Cognitive techniques:

- Keep a journal: Write down daily accomplishments or three things you're grateful for.
- Make "me time": Do something for yourself each day, like meditating, reading, meeting a friend, or enjoying a hobby.
- Seek help: A mental health professional can teach you techniques for managing stress, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).
- Share your feelings: Talk to a trusted loved one or friend. Connecting through conversation can be helpful.
- Take control: Use to-do lists or apps to manage your time and simplify tasks. Plan your day the night before and don't hesitate to say no when needed.