

Stress Relief: Changing Your Response



You are the only person responsible for your thoughts and actions. This simple idea is your most powerful tool for managing stress. Start by having realistic expectations. Then learn to recognize what you can—and can't—control. Finally, think about ways to change your response. With practice, you can learn to let go of stressful ways of thinking.

Have realistic expectations

When it comes to events that cause you stress, ask yourself:

- What are my expectations?
- How likely is it that my expectations, good or bad, will be met? Are they realistic?
- If they aren't met, do I have to respond by feeling badly? How can I work with other outcomes?

Understand what you can do

To get better at managing stress, try these tips:

- **Put the stressor in perspective.** Will being late to work really get you fired?
- **Be flexible and look for answers.** If you're stuck in traffic and your car is stopped or you are not the driver, try calling to let people know you're on the way.
- **Plan ahead for next time.** If being late is a worry, plan to leave a few minutes earlier.
- **Get some physical activity.** Exercise boosts stress-relieving hormones and improves mood.
- **Get enough sleep.** Poor or little sleep can add to your feelings of stress and anxiety.
- **Don't turn to alcohol or drugs.** Drinking and drug use make stress and anxiety worse. If you use drugs or alcohol to reduce stress, see your healthcare provider for help.



Make mountains into molehills

A common cause of stress is feeling as if you have to solve all your problems at once. To shake this feeling, learn to take things one step at a time. Try to break big problems into smaller tasks that you can handle. That way, worries that seem like mountains become little hills you can climb over. Remember, taking small steps will carry you forward. Get professional help if you find you can't manage your stress or your reactions are becoming more frequent or violent. Also get help if you have stress-related symptoms such as anxiety, or insomnia.

For more information, visit National Institute of Mental Health www.nimh.nih.gov or call 866-615-6464.

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