

Living with a Chronic Health Condition: Reducing Stress



Dealing with stress from a chronic illness isn't easy. You may worry about all the things you have to do. But asking for help might make you upset. And being tired or in pain can make stress worse. Learning to control stress does take effort. But reducing stress can help you stay healthy and help you feel better.



Learn to relax

Listening to music, spending some quiet time alone, or taking a warm bath can all be relaxing. But there are many other things that can help you feel calm. Choose activities you enjoy and make them part of your daily life. You may also want to try:

- **Deep breathing.** When you feel tense, take a few deep breaths.
- **Meditation, visualization, tai chi, or yoga.** You might want to take a class in these techniques. Or check the public library for books and audio recordings to help you get started.
- **Exercise.** Even a slow walk around the block can help ease stress. A park or nature path can give the added enjoyment of refreshing sights and sounds. Walking as little as 20 minutes a day has been found to help ease stress. Depending on your health, it can be done all at once or in 10-minute periods.

Set priorities

Try not to worry about things you can't do. Instead, set goals you know you can achieve. Do the things you think are most important first and drop those that are not important to your family, work, or social life. Also look for ways to do things with less effort. Find out what triggers your feelings of stress. Ask yourself:

- Do I really need to do this today? If the answer is yes, take care of that task first. But keep in mind the answer can be no.
- What do I need help with? Is there someone else who can do it? If there isn't, who can I talk with to help me manage the issue or commitment?
- Can I change this appointment or social event to another time?

Finding help

Knowing you can count on others can be a relief. Try these tips:

- Be willing to accept help when it's offered.
- If you need extra help, there are likely to be services nearby. These may include home health aides and visiting nurses. A social worker can help you check your health insurance, look for additional financial support if needed, and put you in touch with the assistance you need.

Prepare for down days

Plan ahead for the times when you need to rest more or limit what you do. Freeze prepared meals so you won't have to cook. Keep a phone and a list of important phone numbers by your bed. If your stress symptoms are getting worse, talk to your healthcare provider. Or think about getting some short-term counseling.

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