

Stress Management

Quick Reference Guide

Ways to De-Stress

Body Scan

In order to relax, we must first learn where, when and how we store tension in our body. Do you know where you store your tension?

Breathing Through Your Diaphragm

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, once said, "Our breath is the bridge from our body to our mind." Deep breaths can instantly relax and soothe anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Stretching

Gentle stretches can also be done almost anywhere; even some neck rolls can help.

Visualization

You can use the power of your mind to reduce stress. Visualize the most peaceful scene you can think of: a snowfall, a waterfall, a lake, the seashore with waves crashing against the beach. Use that same visualization when you are feeling stressed.

Sensory Awareness

Shakespeare once said, "There's not a minute of our lives should stretch without some pleasure." Keep some pleasant scents and textured objects around to give yourself a moment's distraction when needed.

Eating Awareness

When eating, don't let anything else interrupt; savor your food rather than inhaling it.

The Stress Management Pillars

Nutrition

- ✓ No more than two cups of coffee (caffeine) a day.
- ✓ Avoid fast food when possible.
- ✓ Eat lots of fruit and vegetables.
- ✓ Avoid eating at your desk.
- ✓ Allow your body some time to digest food before getting to work again.
- ✓ Drink six to eight glasses of water a day.
- ✓ Avoid snacking on junk food.
- ✓ Read labels so you can avoid foods that are high in carbohydrates and fat.
- ✓ A glass of wine or a bottle of beer at the end of the day (when you get home) is fine, but don't overdo it.

Exercise

- ✓ Experts differ, but try to exercise for at least 20 minutes three times a week.
- ✓ Walking is a great form of exercise.
- ✓ If your day is really busy, set the alarm a half hour earlier and exercise when there are fewer things to distract you.
- ✓ Stretching is good exercise we can do anywhere.
- ✓ Walking at lunch hour rather than sitting at your desk can improve both health and efficiency.
- ✓ If your willpower is low, find a buddy.

Relationships

- ✓ Everybody needs a friend at work.
- ✓ Learn that it is OK to ask for help.
- ✓ Smile more often.
- ✓ Get to know your next-door neighbor.
- ✓ Offer to do something for someone else with no expectation of thanks or payment.
- ✓ Support is reciprocal. Support them and they support you.
- ✓ Don't whine. Nobody wants to be around a whiner.
- ✓ Have a positive relationship with yourself.
- ✓ Listen to what your inner voice is saying and make that voice positive.

Relaxation

- ✓ Remember to breathe.
- ✓ Deep breathing gets blood to our brain and rids our bodies of toxins.
- ✓ Music helps us relax. Lively music perks us up and slower music helps us slow down.
- ✓ Exercise is a form of relaxation.
- ✓ While a shower is invigorating, a long soak in a tub can be very relaxing.
- ✓ Learn how to give a massage and teach your partner how to give you a massage in return.
- ✓ Practice regularly.

Ways to Keep Yourself Flexible

- Learn how to talk to ourselves and pay attention to our inner voice.
- Make a commitment to experience a few things outside our comfort zone each day.
- Practice giving ourselves permission to let go of things: projects, people, opinions, etc.
- Try sitting at a different spot at the table occasionally, taking a different route to work, changing our hairstyle, or going somewhere different to experience different foods.

Managing Time

- Make a to-do list each day, without putting so many things on it that we are guaranteed to fail to complete everything.
- Prioritize your to-do list, with 1 being urgent items, 2 being important but not urgent, and 3 being not important or urgent.
- Recognize that not everything has to be done perfectly. Some things have to be done well. Other things just have to be done.
- Delegate tasks to others, both at work and at home.
- Learn to say, "No" when others ask us to do things we have no time to do, don't want to do, or when we begin to feel taken advantage of.
- Buy a planner and begin scheduling things so we can say, "No" if we have our time planned and someone wants us to do something else.
- Lower your standards to accept a less than perfect life.

Visualization

Here are some peaceful pictures that can help you relax.



Basic Stress Management Strategies

Alter

Sometimes this is the most promising strategy. Let's say you are always stressed when you are going to be late for a meeting. Change the situation by setting an alarm so you will leave five or ten minutes earlier. Or, write the appointment down with a 15-minute cushion. For example, if you have a doctor's appointment at 2:30, write it in your planner for 2:15.

Avoid

On the other hand, that mouthy neighbor may be somebody you can avoid. You know cheese gives you a migraine so you avoid it. You know that your spouse prefers to eat breakfast at 7 a.m. sharp so you accommodate that preference. Forcing ourselves into situations that make us stressed, when we really don't have to be in those situations, is just being a masochist.

Accept

There are some things in life, like taxes, that are unavoidable so we may as well accept these situations with good grace. Let's say going to the dentist makes you stressed. Accept that and deal with it accordingly. Play music before you go. Give yourself some positive self-talk like, "By this time tomorrow it will be all over," "I won't have to do this again for six months," or "I'll get through this."

The Cost of Stress

Remember that stress costs you in many ways.

- High blood pressure or headaches
- Risk of heart attack, stroke, or diabetes
- Always tired and/or angry
- Not feeling much of anything