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How Can I Deal with Stress?

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Stress is a part of life. We all have stress at some time or another. But stress can make it hard to eat well and be active. Living with a chronic disease can also add stress to your life. Here are some ways to deal with stress.

1. Know what stresses you out

Are any of these things worrying you?

- Money issues
- Your job (or not having a job)
- Your health
- Health care expenses
- Your children or family
- Problems in your marriage
- A sick family member or friend

2. Know how you react to stress

What feelings or signs of stress are common for you when you are stressed?

Feelings and Thoughts

- Worrying
- Feeling “down”
- Feeling tense

Behaviors

- Forgetting things
- Unable to get things done
- Nagging
- Bad temper
- Avoiding your friends
- Drinking or smoking more

Physical Signs

- Tired
- Can’t sleep
- Headaches
- Skin rashes
- Changes in appetite
- Upset stomach

3. Choose healthy ways to deal with stress

When you’re stressed out, you may not feel like you have the time or energy to watch what you eat or be physically active. The good news is that **there are lots of healthy ways to deal with stress.**

When you know what stresses you out and how you react to stress, you can deal with the stress in your life (see *Changing Stressful Situations and Avoiding Stress*, next page). The choices you make will depend on what the stressful situation is and who is involved. Choose the best way for you.



Don’t smoke, drink alcohol, or eat more than usual when you are stressed. You’ll only feel worse.

Stressful situations cannot always be avoided. Here are 8 ways to **cope with stress**:

1. Help your body handle stress by **eating well**.
2. Be **physically active** each day. When you are active, your body releases hormones (called endorphins) that make you happy and give you energy.
3. Take a 10-minute **“time out.”** Go for a walk or do some stretches at your desk or workstation, or pamper yourself for a few minutes.
4. Learn different ways to **relax**, such as deep breathing.
5. **Get support** from friends. Talk about what’s bothering you. Friends can give you a different point of view. (See *Getting Support*, page 6)
6. Give yourself **positive messages** every day. Tell yourself, “I’ve done it before and I can do it again.” This will boost your spirits and give you the encouragement you need to face the day.
7. **Pray, meditate** or **worship**.
8. Learn how to **problem-solve** (see *Got Problems?*, page 5)

Changing Stressful Situations and Avoiding Stress

- Plan ahead.** Making a plan of what needs to be done can help you handle or work around a lot of day-to-day stress.
- Set goals** you can reach.
- Take charge** of your time.
- Be realistic** with your schedule.
- Let others help!** Share some of your work with others.
- Walk away** from people and things that make you tense.
- Say “NO”** when you’ve reached your limit. Say “Yes” only when it is important to you.

Relaxation Exercise

To relax, try this simple breathing exercise:

1. Take a full, deep breath.
2. Count to five.
3. Let go of your breath slowly.
4. Let the muscles in your face, arms, legs, and body go completely loose.



Are You Depressed?

Sometimes people are not just stressed out but feel “down” or depressed most of the time. Depression can make it hard to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy pleasant activities.

How will I know if I am depressed?

Depression can affect your feelings and thoughts, your energy and focus, and even your body. Some of the signs of depression are the same as signs of stress. But if you are depressed, you usually will have several different signs or symptoms that affect you nearly every day and for most of the day.

Who gets depressed?

No one really knows why some people get depressed and others do not. Women are more likely than men to say that they are depressed. For some people, life changes and stressful events can bring on depression. But it is normal to grieve and feel sad when you lose someone close. Stressful events can include:

- Loss of a spouse, family member, or close friend
- Relationship difficulties or breakups
- Care for aging parents
- Single parenthood
- Financial problems or unemployment
- Chronic health problems

Signs of Depression

Feelings and Thoughts

Low, sad, miserable
Anxious, excessive worrying
Withdrawn, quiet, alone
Feelings of loss
Afraid
Crying easily
Helpless
Obsess with the past
Agitated, tense, irritable
Angry, hateful
Feeling guilty
Self-critical, low self-esteem
Feeling like a failure, worthless
Hopeless, unbearable
Feeling dead or empty inside
Hating life, suicidal thoughts

Energy and Focus

Fatigue
Heaviness
Hard to concentrate
Disorganized
No motivation
Listless

Physical Signs

No appetite
Can't stop eating
Can't sleep
Early waking
Oversleeping
Body aches



Where can I get help?

If you think you are depressed, getting help is important! **See your doctor** and tell him or her about your feelings or signs of depression.

It is also important to find out whether your depression symptoms might be caused by a medical problem (such as thyroid issues). The symptoms may also be a normal response to a major loss.

What else can I do to help with depression?

- Set **realistic goals**.
- Do what you can as you can. Break large tasks into small ones and **set priorities**.
- Try to be with **other people**.
- Talk** to someone.
- Let our **family and friends** help you.
(See *Getting Support*, page 6)
- Participate** in activities that make you feel better (such as exercise, movies, ballgames, church, and social activities).
- Don't make important decisions **until your depression has lifted**.

You probably won't "snap out of" a depression right away. But with time and help, you can feel a little better day by day.



Remember, feeling better takes time!



If you do not have a doctor, check the Yellow Pages under:

- crisis intervention services
- hospitals
- hotlines
- mental health
- physicians
- social services



Got Problems?

Here are some ideas for solving your problems.

Take a look at your feelings and the problem.

- ❑ Don't try to solve a problem while you are upset or angry. Let strong feelings run their course first. To find a solution, you need to be able to **think clearly**.
- ❑ **Remember your goal** or what you want to do. If you have a goal in mind, you are more likely to solve problems that get in your way.
- ❑ **Be strong and positive**. Don't make up excuses not to solve your problems.



Take small steps towards solving the problem.

Most problems don't solve themselves! Follow these five simple problem-solving steps:

1. **Describe your problem in detail.**
 - Be specific: If you can say exactly what your problem is, you have already solved part of it.
 - Think back: What led up to the problem?
 - See the links in the chain: Identify thoughts or feelings that get in your way, people who don't support you, or things that make you eat more or be less active.
2. **Think about things that might help solve your problem or make it easier to deal with.**
 - Be creative: Come up with as many ways or ideas as you can. You may find more than just one solution!
 - Ask for help: If you need others to help you find a solution, ask for their help or advice.
3. **Pick one option.**
 - Review your possible solutions. Think about the pros and cons of each.
 - Be realistic: Choose an idea that is likely to work and that you can do.
4. **Plan for roadblocks.**
 - Think ahead: What roadblocks might come up?
 - Plan ahead: Write down how you will handle roadblocks.
5. **Act! Try one of the solutions.**
 - Give it your best shot: Decide if it helped. If no, what went wrong?
 - Problem-solve again: If the first solution did not help, try another solution, and another...

Getting Support

We all need help or support at one time or another in our lives.

Support can mean:

- Knowing that family and friends **care about you.**
- Having someone give you a **helping hand.**

Sometimes asking for help can be hard. Here are ways to help you feel comfortable asking for support and getting the type of support you need.

1. Know where to find support.

Look at the list below and think about where you get your support:

- Family
- Friends
- Church and community
- Health care providers (doctors, nurses, dietitians, etc.)
- God (a spiritual power)

2. Get the support you need.

Decide how you would like to be supported by your friends, family, medical team, and others.

- Do you want them to be relaxed, serious, or somewhere in between?
- Do you want them to listen, take your mind off your troubles, or give you guidance?

3. Let them know what will help you most.

Tell them **what** you need and **why**. Don't expect them to be able to read your mind.



4. Accept help from others.

If it is hard for you to ask for help, think about how good it makes people feel to help a friend in need.

5. Say "Thank You."

When you do, people are more likely to offer you support again.

6. Give support to others.

It will come back to you when you need it.



**Getting support is not a sign of weakness.
It's the reason strong people are strong.**