

Ways to Reduce Stress

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Stress is a part of life that cannot be avoided, but too much stress can lead to major health problems, such as heart disease and obesity, and weakens your immune system. While there is no way to make life "stress free," there are many ways to reduce stress.

The following is a list of simple stress reducers from individuals and counselors who have successfully learned how to handle and manage their stress.

Practice Good Time Management –

A lot of stress is added to our day when we work under tight deadlines or have limited time to complete projects or tasks. Here are some basic suggestions for gaining more control of your time.

- **Get up 15 minutes earlier or at least on time.** You'll start the day with enough time and won't feel that you have to "catch-up."
- **Focus only on the present day.** Don't worry about what has already happened or worry in advance about future challenges.
- **Allow extra time for everything.** By planning a tightly packed schedule, you can't be flexible when things are out of your control.
- **Write down everything.** If you want to remember it, put it in writing. There are many tools to help with this, from electronic calendars to the standard notebook.
- **Plan ahead.** Have a timeline for all projects with ample cushion in case things don't go as planned. Be prepared for the unexpected. This also includes stocking supplies and cupboards so that you don't run out of necessities when you need them most.
- **Break projects into small pieces.** Give yourself rewards every time you reach a mini-goal.
- **Do the most unpleasant task first.** Once this is done, you can relax for the rest of the day.
- **Schedule breaks and take them.** These breaks can be incentives throughout the day and give you a needed rest from the task at hand.
- **Delegate tasks.** Remember, you aren't responsible for everything.
- **Work with contingency plans.** Be prepared in case plans fall through. For example, when planning a night out, have 3 restaurants in mind and 3 activity options instead of just one.
- **Visualize success for stressful events and activities.** This helps you mentally prepare for the event, and it is positive, effective self-talk. For example, athletes visualize every step of a race, from waking in the morning, to dressing, to the race itself.

- **Plan for the next day the night before.** Pack your lunch and lay out your clothes. You'll save time in the morning, and are less likely to forget the important details.
- **Go to bed on time.** Your stress level goes up when you aren't well rested.

Change Your Attitude –

You can reduce stress simply by adopting a new attitude, even if you change nothing else in your life. Work to change your perspective:

- **Challenge yourself to see the positive.** View crises or problems as opportunities or learning experiences.
- **Eliminate negative self-talk.** Stop saying "I can't" or other similar phrases.
- **Learn to be flexible.** Anticipate that things won't go as planned all the time and accept that there are other equally acceptable ways to do things.
- **Spend time with positive people.** Surround yourself with supportive friends who encourage a positive attitude.
- **Differentiate what you need and what you want.** Attend to your needs first and then, as time or money allows, attend to your wants. Recognizing that some things aren't absolutely necessary reduces anxiety about that which you don't have.
- **Stop making judgments about people or ideas.** Many times judgments are negative and carry over into other areas of life. They may also create unrealistic and unfair expectations.
- **Talk less and listen more.** Miscommunication can quickly lead to problems, which then lead to stress. Be more conscious of what another person is saying rather than what you are saying to them.
- **Do something nice for someone else.** In doing a random act of kindness, you

can separate yourself from your own worries. It is also very rewarding and fulfilling to make someone else happy.

- **Talk out your problems or discuss your bad days with a friend.** Sharing your pent-up emotions and feelings allows you to release them before they become internalized and more stressful.

Improve Your Health –

An unhealthy lifestyle may make you more vulnerable to stress. Being in good health makes you better equipped with energy to tackle challenges successfully, thereby avoiding stress.

- **Eat a balanced, nutritious diet, rich in fruits and vegetables.** A healthy diet gives your body the proper vitamins and minerals it needs to perform.
- **Get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night.** Being well rested, you can face problems easier and they may not be as stressful.
- **Limit caffeine and alcohol, and if you smoke, quit.** It takes extra energy to process the chemicals in these substances.
- **Monitor your breathing.** Take deep slow breaths to increase oxygen supply throughout your body when you feel stressed or anxious.
- **Exercise.** Not only does exercise improve your cardiovascular health, but it provides a good outlet for stress and anxiety.

Focus on Your Needs –

Taking a little time for yourself to rest and relax is not selfish--it is necessary to recharge your energy. By taking care of yourself, you have the energy to take care of others.

- **Allow yourself to say "no."** Know your limits. If you will not enjoy or appreciate the task or activity, it wastes time that could be spent elsewhere.
- **Find humor in work.** Laughter naturally releases stress and loosens the body.
- **Learn relaxation techniques to do at work and home.** Consider taking a yoga class or practice meditation.

- **Remember that it's okay to make mistakes.** Don't hold yourself and others to unfair expectations of perfection.
- **Nurture your child side.** Many adults remember childhood as carefree and fun, so relive it! Read a children's book, swing at the park, or draw a picture.
- **Do something fun and enjoyable for yourself everyday.** You may be working hard to please others, your manager, your family, and many more, but don't forget about yourself. Dedicate some time to do something that you value.
- **Accept that there are some things you cannot change.** You could spend hours thinking about things that you cannot change and you would only be worse for it, losing energy and time and increasing stress. Recognize that you are not happy with something, accept it, and move on.
- **Separate worries from concerns.** Worries waste your time because there is nothing that you can do about them except think about them. With concerns, identify what you can change and let it be.
- **Stop worrying about past decisions.** Eliminate the phrase, "I should have" from your vocabulary. It's not helpful and only reduces your self-esteem. You learn from the decision and move on.
- **Balance your workweek with your weekends.** For example, if you spend your weekdays at the computer, plan some energetic activities for the weekend.

Conclusion –

Everyone experiences stress, but there are ways to control it. To improve your overall well-being, take proactive steps to manage stress by learning coping skills and strategies.