

Eleven Strategies to Reduce Stress

Researchers agree that a limited amount of stress is an important component of a healthy, happy, productive life. However, too much stress can negatively affect your relationships, job performance, and your health.

miVibe partners agree, the key is to successfully manage your stress to prevent it from becoming overwhelming and offers the following tips for managing your stress.

1. Identify the source of your stress.

Look for the reason or reasons behind the thought or worry. Ask yourself these questions:

- “Why am I worrying about this?”
- “Is there anything I can do about it?”
- “Is there anything I want to do about it?”

2. Learn the principles of time management.

- Use calendars and lists.
- Prioritize important tasks.
- Be realistic about the time you need to finish jobs.
- Leave room in your schedule for unexpected demands.

3. Don't agree to do things that you can't or don't want to do.

Come up with 5 or 6 ways to say no. Whenever you're in a situation where you would really be better off saying no, just pull out one of the ways and use it. Saying no gets easier after you've done it a few times.

4. Pay attention to your body.

- Get enough sleep.
- Get some exercise.
Exercise not only provides a mental lift, it boosts the body's ability to handle stress and reduces the risk of stress-related problems. You don't need to buy a membership to the gym or the latest high impact aerobics video. Just be more active in your day-to-day life.
- Eat well-balanced meals as often as possible.
- Reduce your intake of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Keep current on your health screenings (cholesterol, blood pressure, cancer, etc.).

5. Try relaxation techniques.

Here's one to get you started: *Breathe in through your nose for the count of 4, hold it for 7, exhale through your nose for 8. Repeat this 4 times.*

Relaxation strategies such as this one are most effective if you do them before they are needed. Don't wait until the tension builds. Incorporate these techniques into your daily routine. Start when you first rise in the morning, then do them when you get in your car, at stop lights, before meals, waiting to use the copy machine at work, in the check-out line, before you go to sleep at night; any time there is a natural break in your day.

Other examples of relaxation techniques include progressive muscle relaxation (tensing and relaxing, or simply relaxing, the main muscle groups starting with your toes and gradually moving to your head), meditation, listening to relaxation tapes or relaxing music, yoga, massage, and aromatherapy.

6. Change what you are saying. In other words, turn negative self-statements into positive ones.

Most of us are very good at blaming ourselves. When we make a mistake we say things like, "That was really stupid" or "I am always doing something stupid." Instead of saying something negative, say "Everyone makes mistakes" or "It's okay to make a mistake and I can learn from this and move on."

7. Schedule time for yourself.

The key word here is "schedule." Find or rediscover an activity that you enjoy and schedule time each week for that activity.

8. Enjoy the journey.

When we focus all of our thoughts and energies on the future, life rapidly passes us by. Enjoy and live in the present. Occasionally you just need to stop, look around, and remind yourself that "this is the good stuff."

9. Talk to others.

First, find someone you can confide in. If you can't talk to a family member or friend, you may want to talk to your priest or pastor, a counselor, or your doctor.

10. Shun the "super person" urge.

No-one can be great at everything. No-one is perfect. Put your energy into activities that you do well and give you the most satisfaction.

11. Build humor into your life.

Laughter is a powerful stress-reliever. Start looking for humor in everyday situations. Learn to laugh at yourself.

Although stress is a normal part of life, extreme or prolonged stress can lead to illnesses that will need specialized treatment. If stress is causing physical symptoms, severe anxiety, or making it difficult for you to function normally, see your doctor.