

Manage Your Stress: Ten Ways to Ease Stress

Date updated: February 04, 2007
Content provided by Cleveland Clinic

1. Eat and drink sensibly. Alcohol and food abuse may seem to reduce stress, but it actually adds to it.
2. Assert yourself. You do not have to meet others' expectations or demands. It's okay to say "No." Remember, being assertive allows you to stand up for your rights and beliefs while respecting those of others.
3. Stop smoking or other bad habits. Aside from the obvious health risks of cigarettes, nicotine acts as a stimulant and brings on more stress symptoms. Give yourself the gift of dropping unhealthy habits.
4. Exercise regularly. Choose non-competitive exercise and set reasonable goals. Aerobic exercise has been shown to release endorphins (natural substances that help you feel better and maintain a positive attitude).
5. Study and practice relaxation techniques. Relax every day. Choose from a variety of different techniques. Combine opposites; a time for deep relaxation and a time for aerobic exercise is a sure way to protect your body from the effects of stress.
6. Take responsibility. Control what you can and leave behind what you cannot control.
7. Reduce stressors (cause of stress). Many people find that life is filled with too many demands and too little time. For the most part, these demands are ones we have chosen. Effective time-management skills involve asking for help when appropriate, setting priorities, pacing yourself, and taking time out for yourself.
8. Examine your values and live by them. The more your actions reflect your beliefs, the better you will feel, no matter how busy your life is. Use your values when choosing your activities.
9. Set realistic goals and expectations. It's okay, and healthy, to realize you cannot be 100% successful at everything at once.
10. Sell yourself to yourself. When you are feeling overwhelmed, remind yourself of what you do well. Have a healthy sense of self-esteem.

There are several other methods you can use to relax or reduce stress, including:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Mental imagery relaxation
- Relaxation to music
- Biofeedback (explained below)
- Counseling, to help you recognize and release stress

Ask your health care provider for more information about these techniques.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback helps a person learn stress-reduction skills by providing information about muscle tension, heart

rate, and other vital signs as a person attempts to relax. It is used to gain control over certain bodily functions that cause tension and physical pain.

Biofeedback can be used to help you learn how your body responds in stressful situations, and how to better cope. If a headache, such as a migraine, begins slowly, many people can use biofeedback to stop the attack before it becomes full-blown.

What to do if you have trouble sleeping

You may experience insomnia (an inability to sleep) because of discomfort, stress from personal concerns, or side effects from your medications. If you cannot sleep, try these tips:

- Establish a regular sleep schedule -- go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Make sure your bed and surroundings are comfortable. Arrange the pillows so you can maintain a comfortable position.
- Keep your bedroom dark and quiet.
- Use your bedroom for sleeping only; don't work or watch TV in your bedroom.
- Avoid napping too much during the day. At the same time, remember to balance activity with rest during recovery.
- If you feel nervous or anxious, talk to your spouse, partner, or a trusted friend. Get your troubles off your mind.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Do NOT take sleeping pills -- they are very harmful when taken with your other medications.
- Take diuretics, or "water pills" earlier, if possible, so you don't have to get up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom.
- If you can't sleep, get up and do something relaxing until you feel tired. Don't stay in bed worrying about when you're going to fall asleep.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Maintain a regular exercise routine; don't exercise within 2-3 hours before bed time.

