

## 9 Ways to Dial Down Your Stress

Here are a few tips to help you manage the stress in your life.



It's not healthy for you to be stressed all the time. Too much stress has been associated with headaches, muscle pain, sleeplessness, anxiety, depression and unwanted weight gain or loss. When we are too stressed, our body releases hormones to help us hold up under pressure. These hormones can be harmful if our body continues to release them over an extended period of time and affect our health.

Whatever the cause of your stress, it's important to have coping tools to help you manage it. Here are nine ways that may help.

- 1. Figure out the cause.** Consider keeping a stress journal. Whenever you feel stressed, write down the cause, how it made you feel and how you dealt with it. Some helpful patterns might emerge. You may find that certain situations or people trigger your stress.
- 2. Remember four healthier ways to cope:** You can choose to *avoid* the stressor, if you can, *alter* the situation, *adapt* to it or *accept* it. You can also change your perception of what is stressful to you as you build up more coping skills.

3. **Map out your day.** If you have a rough idea of what you want to get done, you can mark tasks off your list with satisfaction. Sometimes getting the hardest task done first works well, so you can start the day with a sense of accomplishment.
4. **Prepare for tense situations.** If you know you face a tough conversation or some other awkwardness, practice how you'll handle it. Use positive self talk to get through hard situations: "This is hard, but I know I can get through it."
5. **Use relaxation techniques.** Try meditation or deep breathing. Gentle stretches or a warm shower might help loosen you up. If you haven't meditated before, learn a few techniques and try for just a few minutes the first day.
6. **Get moving.** Healthy adults should strive for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. Do more if you can. Even 10 minutes at a time counts. Add strength-building exercises on at least two days of the week. Consult with your doctor before starting any new exercise routine.
7. **Eat a balanced diet.** Fuel up with fiber-rich fruits and vegetables, fiber, proteins low in fat and salt, and low-fat or fat-free dairy.
8. **Avoid using alcohol or drugs to deal with stress.** If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation. This means up to one drink a day for women, two for men. Some people should drink less than these amounts or not use alcohol at all. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about alcohol use or have difficulty drinking in moderation.
9. **Ask for help if you need it.** Stress affects everyone differently. You might just need a supportive friend to visit with or a support group for people who are going through the same thing. Talk to your doctor or a mental health counselor if your stress is overwhelming. Check your health plan to understand what benefits are covered when you make appointments with a mental health or medical professional.

By Ginny Greene, Contributing Editor

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