



Education

Stress Management

What is stress management?

Stress management is the mastery of specific skills that help reduce the negative effects of stress on the body and mind.

Techniques of stress management include diaphragmatic breathing, mental imaging, and progressive muscle relaxation.

How does stress occur?

Going to school, starting a new job, marrying, raising a family, being promoted, growing old, and facing illness can all be stressful. A certain amount of stress in our lives is unavoidable and a little may even be good for us. Some people claim they can accomplish more if they have a work deadline. Too much stress, however, is harmful. Symptoms like back pain, trouble sleeping, headaches, muscle aches, heartburn, upset stomach, shortness of breath, high blood pressure, and weight gain or weight loss are often caused in part by stress. Many office visits to health care providers are for conditions related to stress.

What are the symptoms of stress?

Symptoms of stress vary from person to person, but some general signs are:

- chronic fatigue
- change in appetite
- increase in alcohol, drug, or cigarette use
- change in bowel or bladder habits
- body aches and pains not caused by exercise
- change in sleeping or waking patterns
- change in behavior or emotional patterns.

How long do the effects of stress last?

Stress is a part of living. You can't avoid it. What you can change, however, is how you adapt to the stresses of life. This is important because if you are feeling high levels of stress over a long time, worsening symptoms or even diseases are more likely to occur.

How can I take care of myself?

Taking care of yourself starts with recognizing the unhealthy ways you may deal with stress (for example, drinking too much alcohol or eating unhealthy meals). You can then try a healthier approach.

The following recommendations are some of the ways you can reduce the effects of stress on your life:

- Exercise for at least 30 minutes at least 5 times a week.
 - Do something just for yourself. Getting a new haircut or having a therapeutic massage can do wonders when you're under a lot of stress.
 - Recognize the things that upset you and try to develop a positive attitude toward those you cannot avoid.
 - Simplify your life. Don't try to do too much. Set goals you can achieve. Learn to say "no."
 - Develop methods for relaxation; for example, talk with supportive people, take up a hobby, listen to music,
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- watch movies, take walks.
- Try not to "self-medicate" with food, alcohol, or over-the-counter medicines. Covering up a problem can make the stress even worse.
 - Learn to use relaxation techniques, such as mental imaging, diaphragmatic breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation.
 - Get adequate, regular amounts of rest and sleep (6 to 10 hours a night).
 - Eat a healthy diet.
 - Drink less coffee and alcohol.
 - Use positive thoughts and humor to overcome negative thoughts. Rent a comedy from a video store. Share it with friends and laugh your stressors away.
 - Seek professional help for dealing with especially stressful events in your life.

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