

Managing Stress: Ways to Relieve Stress

The best way to manage your stress is to learn healthy coping strategies. You can start practicing these tips right away. Try one or two until you find a few that work for you. Practice these things until they become habits you turn to when you feel stress. These activities focus on relaxing your mind and your body.

- Listen to music.
- Play with a pet.
- Laugh or cry.
- Go out with a friend (shopping, movie, dining).
- Take a bath or shower.
- Write, paint, or do other creative activities.
- Pray or go to church.
- Exercise or get outdoors to enjoy nature.
- Discuss situations with a spouse or close friend.
- Garden or make home repairs.
- Practice deep breathing, meditation or muscle relaxation.
- Seek counseling if you continue to struggle with stress.

A stress journal can help you identify the things that cause stress in your life. You can also track the way you deal with stress. Each time you feel stressed, write it in your journal. As you keep a daily log, you will begin to see patterns. Write down:

- What caused your stress (make a guess if you're not sure).
- How you felt (physically and emotionally).
- How you acted in response.
- What you did to make yourself feel better.

Unhealthy Ways of Coping with Stress

Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that make the problems worse. These coping strategies may reduce stress for a while, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking.
- Drinking too much.
- Overeating or not eating enough.
- Withdrawing from friends, family and activities.
- Using pills or drugs to relax.
- Sleeping too much.
- Putting things off (procrastinating).
- Taking your stress out on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence).
- Support groups are also available in most communities. Find a support group near you.

Sources:

American Psychological Association, American Heart Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health