



STRESS MANAGEMENT

It may seem that there's nothing you can do about your stress level. The bills aren't going to stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day for all your errands, and your career or family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realisation that you're in control of your life is the foundation of stress management.

Managing stress is all about taking charge. Taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment, and the way you deal with problems. The goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun – plus the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on.

IDENTIFY THE SOURCES OF STRESS IN YOUR LIFE

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook your own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:

- Do you explain away stress as temporary? (“I just have a million things going on right now”) even though you can't remember the last time you took a breather?

- Do you define stress as an integral part of your work or home life (“Things are always crazy around here”) or as a part of your personality? (“I have a lot of nervous energy, that's all”).
- Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional?

UNHEALTHY WAYS OF COPING WITH STRESS

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence).

HEALTHY WAYS TO RELAX AND RECHARGE

- Go for a walk
- Spend time in nature
- Call a good friend
- Sweat out tension with a good workout
- Write in your journal
- Take a long bath
- Light scented candles
- Savour a warm cup of coffee or tea
- Play with a pet
- Work in your garden
- Get a massage
- Curl up with a good book
- Listen to music
- Watch a comedy

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY: ADOPT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

EXERCISE REGULARLY

Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.



EAT A HEALTHY DIET

Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.

REDUCE CAFFEINE AND SUGAR

The temporary “highs” caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, fizzy drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.

AVOID ALCOHOL, CIGARETTES, AND DRUGS

Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

