

POSITIVE STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress is a normal physical and psychological response to life events. The brain is hard-wired with an alarm system to trigger stress responses for your protection. Stress can manifest as mental, social and physical symptoms. Learning to identify these symptoms and treat them is critical to emotional health.

While there are a lot of factors that may cause stress, this resource guide will briefly introduce you to different types of stress but will focus on showing you healthy practices to help you balance it and keep yourself accountable.

Types of Stress

- **Eustress**, or “good” stress, benefits us and helps us grow. Examples of eustress include learning a new language, training in a new process at work, or visiting a new place. All these activities can be stressful but exciting, which then energizes and motivates us in the short term.
- **Distress** is negative stress that hinders growth and flourishing. Distress diminishes our abilities, while eustress enhances them.
- **Acute Emotional Distress** is directly related to emotions. Emotions determine how people respond to their lives, environments, social situations and change. This term is very similar to “panicking” in which your heart rate, breathing and blood pressure speed up. Emotions can be unpredictable, making it hard to determine the root of emotional responses.
- **Chronic Stress** occurs when your internal stress alarm stays stuck on. The body is not meant to stay on high alert for extended periods, which negatively affects almost every bodily system. Chronic stress can lead to health problems such as heart disease, insomnia, digestive disorders, obesity, memory impairment and depression.

Common Stressors

- **Emotional:** Fears, anxieties, attitudes, beliefs, uncertainty, lack of control
- **Social:** Dating, parties, meeting new people, gender or race differences, sexual orientation
- **Change:** Moving, new job, having a baby, promotion, divorce, death of a loved one
- **Work:** Tight deadlines, impossible workload, endless emails, unpredictable boss
- **Physical:** Working long hours without enough sleep, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, pregnancy
- **Health:** Managing a chronic condition such as heart disease, diabetes or arthritis; injuries
- **Environmental:** Noise, pollution, crime, overcrowding, lack of space, too much or too little light



Reduce Your Stress

- **Attitude Changes:** Sometimes, being intentional about the spaces you put yourself in could help you reduce stress in your life. Here are a few suggestions that could help you:
 - Avoid unnecessary stress. Avoid stressful people when possible.
 - Learn to say “no” when your schedule is already full and manage your time.
 - Adapt to stressors. Change perspective and reactions.
 - Practice acceptance and forgiveness for what you can’t control.
 - Develop a support system. Ask for help when needed.



- **Energize:** Many believe exercise is the best stress reliever. But exercise is only part of the answer. Relaxation techniques, eating healthy, and exercising are great combinations that can help you burn your stress and calories at the same time. Consider the following activities
 - **Cardio:** Find an activity that you love to do. Dancing, bike riding, swimming, walking, skating and jogging are great cardiovascular activities.
 - **Weight training:** Bodyweight exercises include pushups, sit-ups, squats and lunges, or you can use dumbbells, kettlebells or weight machines.
 - **Recreation:** Joining a sports team or group exercise class can be a fun way to get in exercise as well as socialize with others.

- **Mindfulness/ Meditation:** The purpose of mindfulness or meditation is to focus on our breath to bring us back to the present moment – not ruminating on past events or worrying about the future. The purpose is not to stop our thoughts – rather acknowledge that our thoughts are just thoughts. You can practice mindfulness or meditation by:
 - Listening to calming music, podcasts or various meditation recordings. Common meditations are breath awareness, body scans and walking meditations.
 - Sitting in a comfortable position, placing one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly. Take a deep breath through your nose and let your belly push your hand out. Repeat up to 10 times, paying attention to your breath the whole time.
 - Multiple apps on your phone or resources online are free – research what works best for you!
- **Sleep:** The brain and body recharge during sleep. But sleep suffers with too much to do and think about. Mood, energy level, concentration and overall functioning are affected by the quality and quantity of sleep. Try the following activities for trouble sleeping:
 - Listen to calming music
 - Place noisy objects away from the bed
 - Maintain a regular rise and bedtime schedule
 - Develop a quiet, relaxing pre-bedtime routine



Keep Yourself Accountable

- **Journaling:** Writing out your to-do list, thoughts, worries, frustrations, ideas, or even solutions to problems can be very cathartic. There is no wrong way to keep a journal – find a method that works best for you. Some ideas include:
 - **ABC To-Do List:** Write out every task that is on your mind. Put an “A” for items that need to be accomplished today, a “B” for items that can wait until tomorrow, and a “C” for items that can wait a few days.
 - **Worry Journal:** Simply write down your thoughts and potential reasons for why you may be feeling a certain way. Journaling serves as an escape or emotional release and forces us to check out of everything else to simply focus on ourselves.
 - **Gratitude Journal:** Count your blessings and enjoy better health and happiness. Individuals who noted (mentally or physically) grateful thoughts are more optimistic about life and upcoming events.



My Personal List – Positive Stress Management Techniques That Work for ME:

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