

7 Tips to Bring Down Stress

How to Manage Daily Stress



Stress Affects Everyone

It's a natural part of life. A little stress can be helpful, motivating us to take action. Mostly, people feel like they have too much stress in their lives or it's getting harder to cope with it.

When we face a stressful event, the nervous system activates the release of hormones (cortisol and adrenaline), whether it's a life-threatening event or non-life-threatening. It's called the flight-or-fight stress response; muscles tense up, breathing gets faster, pulse speeds up, more oxygen goes to the brain. We become ready to react fast to protect ourselves from physical harm.

In daily life, most people face non-life-threatening events, but the stress-response may kick in anyway as a reaction to stressors. If the nervous system isn't calmed down, it continues to release stress hormones, leading to chronic stress. Too much stress, over time, is harmful to health and happiness and may lead to more problems, including mental health issues and physical illness. So, there are many reasons to keep the stress hormones at bay.

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The adverse effects of stress can be reduced daily by taking simple practical steps. To help with this, choose one or more of these stress management tips:

- Get to know the early **warning signs** in your body that tell you when you're stressed, such as irritability, being easily angered, headaches, tension in your jaw, low energy or difficulty sleeping. Notice changes in eating habits or increased alcohol and other substance use. The signs vary for each person.

- Identify the **triggers** that bring on stress and find ways to remove the trigger if possible. Practice calming yourself down before the onset of a known trigger such as seeing certain people, working late, parenting situations or being hungry. Taking in a few deep breaths beforehand is one way to calm down.
- Set up **routines** for a typical day or week that include regular times for waking up and going to bed, meal times, consistent exercise, and relaxation. Following a schedule that's predictable and routine can be calming and supportive, helping you to manage your stress.
- Focus on your **self-care** by eating healthy food, drinking plenty of water, exercising regularly, being outdoors, and getting adequate sleep. Make time for enjoyable activities, hobbies or activities that calm or inspire you. Basic self-care enhances your ability to cope with stress.
- Keep in touch with your **community** of family, friends, church members, club members, and others who brighten your day. Be open to asking for help and sharing your thoughts and feelings when opportunities come up. Spending time with people you care about and who care about you is a great way to de-stress.
- Become aware of negative **self-talk** that makes you feel worse. Mentally, repeating statements like: 'I can't do this,' or 'I'm too busy,' or 'I'm so tired' can add to stress. While they may be a bit accurate, they are usually counter-productive. Instead, say calming or encouraging things such as: 'Calm down,' or 'Take a deep breath,' or 'I'm doing ok all things considered,' or 'I got this.' Keeping things in perspective helps to lower overall stress.
- To settle down your nervous system, **practice relaxing** with activities like: yoga, meditation, walking in nature, deep breathing, gardening, listening to music, taking a bath, or reading. The idea is to choose something that you look forward to, scheduling relaxation as a way to readjust your body and mind.

Whether you feel like stress has hijacked you right now or not, *now* is the time to pick one tip and master it. Make it a habit by applying it over and over so that it becomes second-nature. Then pick another one. Incorporating stress reduction techniques into your daily life is often the best antidote to stress you can have.

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