

STRESS MANAGEMENT: Stress . . . what is this?

Stress is a normal part of life that all people feel at some point in time. It usually arises when we feel out of control of something in our lives. Stress can sometimes be positive when it helps us focus and get work done. Most of the time however, stress makes us feel worse and hinders our ability to accomplish the tasks we have before us.

How does stress make you feel? Stress affects people differently. What stresses one person out may be very different from what stresses another person. Stress can affect you physically (headaches, stomach aches, or exhaustion), emotionally (fear or sadness), or mentally (increased anxiety). Feeling stressed for a long period of time can be detrimental to your health, relationships with friends or family, and your ability to be productive.

So, how should I deal with my stress? There are lots of different ways to handle stress. Stress management is individual, which means you have to find out what will work best for you.

Here are some ideas of how to deal with stress:

1. **ATTITUDE:** How do you approach things? Are you an optimist or a pessimist? We can't control some of the situations in which we find ourselves, but . . . we can control what we think about those situations and how we react. Instead of feeling angry and upset, take control!
2. **DEEP BREATHING:** Deep breathing is an excellent way to decrease your stress level. Breathe in through your nose for three seconds, hold your breath for three seconds, and then, breathe out for three seconds. Repeat this 3-4 times and see how you feel.
3. **EXERCISE:** Exercise is one of the best ways to handle stress. It increases a person's energy level, produces endorphins which is a chemical the body produces naturally that tells the brain to relax, and it helps you sleep better.
4. **SLEEP:** Make sure you are getting enough continuous uninterrupted sleep every night.
5. **VISUALIZATION:** Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a peaceful setting.
6. **JOURNALING:** Writing it all down can help you process more of what is going on in your life and what is stressing you out.
7. **PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION:** PMR is a process where a person tenses a muscle group for a short period of time (10 seconds) and then relaxes it. This process is repeated throughout all of the major muscle groups. People often start at the top, with the head/face, and work their way down to the feet.

8. **MEDITATION:** Close your eyes and concentrate on a calming thought. Maybe, put on some calming music in the background or come up with a word that you say continuously while relaxing. Pay attention to your breathing and work on taking deep, slow breaths.

9. **POSITIVE SELF-TALK:** Whenever you find yourself criticizing something you have done, stop it and think about something positive.