

Prevent Stress from Managing Your Life

Stress management training can help you deal with changes in a healthier way

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Stress is a normal reaction the body has when changes occur, which results in physical, emotional and intellectual responses. Stress management training can help you deal with changes in a healthier way.

Stress is a very normal reaction that happens to everyone. In fact, the human body is designed to experience stress and react to it. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces physical and mental responses. That is stress.

Such responses help your body adjust to new situations. Believe it or not, stress can be a positive in keeping us alert, motivated and ready to avoid danger. However, stress becomes a problem when stressors continue without relief or periods of relaxation.

So what happens to the body during stress? The body autonomic nervous system controls your heart rate, breathing, vision changes and more. The “fight-or-flight response,” helps the body face stressful situations.

When a person has long-term (chronic) stress, continued activation of the stress response causes wear and tear on the body. Physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms develop.

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Aches and pains.
- Chest pain or a feeling like your heart is racing.
- Exhaustion or trouble sleeping.
- High blood pressure.
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching.
- Stomach or digestive problems.

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Stress can lead to emotional and mental symptoms like:

- Anxiety or irritability.
- Depression.
- Panic attacks.
- Sadness.

Often people with chronic stress try to manage it with unhealthy behaviors including:

- Drinking alcohol too much or too often.
- Gambling.
- Smoking.
- Using drugs.

Strategies for Reducing Stress

You cannot avoid stress, but you can stop it from becoming overwhelming by practicing some daily strategies:

- Exercise when you feel symptoms of stress coming on. Even a short walk can boost your mood.
- At the end of each day, take a moment to think about what you have accomplished – not what you did not get done.
- Set goals for your day, week, and month. Narrowing your view will help you feel more in control of the moment and long-term tasks.

Preventing Stress is Possible

Many daily strategies can help you keep stress at bay. For example:

- Try relaxation activities, such as meditation, yoga or breathing exercises and muscle relation.
- Take diligent care of your body each day. Eating right, exercising, and getting enough sleep will help your body handle stress much better.
- Stay positive and practice gratitude, acknowledging the good parts of our day or life.
- Accept that you cannot control everything. Find ways to let go or worry about situations you cannot change.
- Learn to say “NO” to additional responsibilities when you are too busy or stressed.

Stay connected with people who keep calm, make you happy, provide emotional support and help you with practical things.

A friend, family member or neighbor can become a good listener or share responsibilities so that stress doesn't become overwhelming.

If you are using drugs or alcohol to cope, or if you have thoughts about hurting yourself, it's time to see a doctor. Your primary care provider can help by offering advice, prescribing medicine, or referring you to a therapist or counselor.

Just remember that stress is not a bad thing if you manage it, and not let it manage YOU!

Take care of yourself and each other.

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