

## Stress Management

### The Harmful Effects of Stress

- Psychological stress can contribute to physical ailments like hypertension, unhealthy weight changes, heart disease, stroke, digestive problems, and back pain.
- It can also cause cognitive impairments like poor attention span and forgetfulness.
- Excessive stress can create emotional problems like anxiety and depression, and it can interfere with healthy relationships.

### Behavioral Stress Management Strategies

- Keep healthy by eating a good diet, exercising as directed by your doctor, and getting plenty of sleep.
- Keep your life as organized as possible. Structure a productive daily routine and stick to it as best you can. Also, maintain a tidy physical environment.
- Make time for some fun so you don't get burned out. This time can also be used to nurture the relationships that might be jeopardized by your stress.
- Add relaxation to your daily routine. That could mean 15 minutes of Yoga, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Meditation, or any other method you find helpful.
- Breathe. Inhale *deeply* through your nose, hold it for a second, and exhale *completely*. This will rid your body of respiratory waste products like CO<sup>2</sup>. You should use this technique when you feel stressed, but you can also anchor it to some daily event to make it a habit. For example, you could do it before brushing your teeth.
- Smile! Do it right now: put a big smile on your face for no reason. You'll be amazed how quickly the "happy centers" of your brain are activated. Make an effort to smile more, and your load will feel a little lighter.

### Cognitive Stress Management Strategies

- Compartmentalize your stressors. Think of your mind as being made up of little boxes. Each stressor goes in its own box, and only one box can be open at a time. Conceptualizing stress this way will help you focus on one problem at a time, & you'll feel less overwhelmed.
- Be present. Much of stress is fretting over the past or dwelling on what might happen in the future. Make an intentional effort to focus on the *right now*. In this moment, you are okay. Focus on the things you are able to control.
- Don't be paralyzed by a victim mentality. Your stressors are not punishments. They're just obstacles.
- Change the way you view failure. It doesn't define who you are. It just means you're learning lessons. More than anything, failure is a growth opportunity.
- Clarify which parts of life you can control and which parts you must accept. Fighting against things you can't change is pointless, and accepting problems you can change is selling yourself short.
- Find your heroes. These can be people you know or historical figures. Remind yourself of the obstacles they overcame to reach their goals. Think of your personal heroes every day and let them inspire you.
- Be strong (but not always). It's okay to let your guard down & feel sad or scared. Those are normal emotions, and there's no shame in feeling them. Suppressing them will make your stress worse.
- Use positive *self-talk*. Imagine what you'd say to a friend who was stressed out. What would you say to soothe her? Now, mentally say those things to yourself. It's important to be kind to yourself.

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