

A guide to stress and resiliency

What are stress and resilience? Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, makes you breathe faster, and gives you a burst of energy. Resilience is an "inner strength" that helps you bounce back after stressful situations. When you are resilient, you may recover more quickly from setbacks or difficult changes, including illness.

Some stress is normal and even useful. Stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you win a race or finish an important job on time. But if stress happens too often or lasts too long, it can make you moody, tense, or depressed. Your relationships may suffer, and you may not do well at work or school. It can also be linked to physical issues such as headaches, upset stomach, back pain, trouble sleeping and a weakened immune system.

Developing resilience begins with simple actions or thoughts that you practice, such as planning for what you will do next and learning to accept change. Being resilient doesn't mean that you find it easy to deal with difficult or stressful situations or that you won't feel angry, sad, or worried during tough times. But it does mean that you won't feel so overwhelmed. You will be less likely to give up and more likely to cope with stressful situations in healthy ways.

What can you do about stress?

It is important to figure out what causes you stress because everyone feels and responds to it differently.

Stress management tips:

- Learn to manage your time. You may get more done with less stress if you make a schedule. Think about which things are most important and do those first.
- Think about ways to cope. A good exercise is to track your stress. Write down when something makes you feel stressed, how you reacted and what you did to deal with the stress. Then, think about your reaction. Was it positive or negative? What can you do to manage stress more productively in the future?
- Take good care of yourself. Get plenty of rest. Eat well. Don't smoke. Limit how much alcohol you drink.
- Practice positive self-talk. When you find yourself starting to worry, try to stop the thoughts and replace them with something positive. Or, write down your worries and work on letting go of things you cannot change. Learn to say "no."
- Speak up. Not being able to talk about your needs and concerns creates stress and can make negative feelings worse. Assertive communication can help you express how you feel in a thoughtful, tactful way.
- Ask for help. People who have a strong network of family and friends manage stress better.
- Sometimes stress is just too much to handle alone. Talking to a friend or family member may help, but you may also want to see a counselor.

How can you relieve stress?

Stress is a fact of life for most people. You may not be able to get rid of stress, but you can look for ways to lower it or get it out of your system.

Stress relieving activities:

- Exercise. Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage stress. Walking is a great way to get started.
- Write. Writing about the things that are bothering you helps you process and deal with them.
- Let your feelings out. Talk, laugh, cry, and express anger when you need to with someone you trust.
- Do something you enjoy. A hobby can help you relax. Volunteer work or work that helps others can be a great stress reliever.
- Learn ways to relax your body. This can include breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, massage, aromatherapy, yoga, or relaxing exercises like tai chi and qi gong.
- Focus on the present. Try meditation and imagery exercises. Listen to relaxing music. Try to look for the humor in life. Laughter really can be the best medicine.

Why is resilience important?

People who are resilient often work to have a positive outlook on life. You can build resilience on your own, and a counselor or therapist can also help you.

How can you build resilience?

- Change how you think. Challenge automatic negative thoughts and look for more positive interpretations). Accept that things change. Look at change as a challenge rather than a threat. Examine how and why you feel the way you do when things change. Expect things to work out. You can't change what happens, but you can change how you feel about it.
- See the big picture. Find the positive in stressful situations and learn from the situation. Look for things to learn. Difficult or emotional situations can teach you about yourself. Look to the future, and ask yourself how the stressful event might help you. See the funny side of bad situations.
- Change how you act. Seek out interactions with people who make you feel better. Build relationships that are solid and loving with your family and others. Help them, and don't be afraid to let them help you. Develop a support network. Believe in yourself and the things you can do. Solve problems. Look at all aspects of a problem and brainstorm solutions. Ask friends for suggestions. Do things to gain self-confidence and build self-esteem. For example, list the things you've achieved in your life or those that make you proud.
- Take good care of yourself. Do things that you enjoy. See a movie. Have a good meal. Laugh with your friends. Know what's important to you. Relax your mind and body through techniques such as deep breathing and guided imagery. Talk about how you are feeling and manage your emotions. Be thankful for the good you see around yourself.

How can you help children and teens with stress?

Generally, anything that may cause children or teens to experience fear and anxiety can cause stress. This can include day-to-day stressors such as being away from home, worrying about getting along with others, concerns about their changing bodies or critical incidents such as the death of a loved one, coping with a serious illness or experiencing a natural disaster.

Adults can help children and teens with stress in many ways. Two important ways are creating a low-stress environment and helping them develop positive coping skills.

Tips for developing a low-stress environment:

- Acknowledge your child's feelings. If appropriate, reassure them that you can understand why they feel sad or scared.
- Develop trust and let your child know that mistakes are learning experiences.
- Be supportive and listen to your child's concerns. Allow your child to try to solve their own problems, if appropriate. But offer to help and be available to your child when they need you.
- Show care, warmth, and love. Hug your child often.
- Have clear expectations without being overly rigid; emphasize cooperation over competition. Do not over-schedule your child with too many activities.
- Find ways to have your child contribute to the family.
- Build on the strengths of the family.
- Be aware of what your child wants (not just what you want).

It is important to help children develop positive coping skills, as these skills are often carried into adult life. You can help by:

- Providing a good example. Keep calm and express your anger in appropriate ways. Think through plans to reduce stress and share them with your family.
- Encouraging rational thinking. Be sure your children think about consequences of their actions. Help them understand what fantasy is and what is reality. For example, a child's behavior did not cause a divorce, or they are not failures because they were not picked first for something.
- Providing them with some control. Allow your children to make choices within your family framework. For example, allow them to arrange their room, choose family activities, and help make family decisions.
- Talking openly. When appropriate, talk about your stressful day. Encourage them to talk about what is bothering them.
- Finding a physical activity and/or hobby that they enjoy and encouraging them to participate.
- Encouraging them to eat healthy foods and emphasizing the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- Learning and teaching your children relaxation skills such as breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, meditating, praying, yoga, drawing, or writing.