

**HOW TO MANAGE STRESS:
A KEY TO RELAXATION
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Stress is usually considered to be an external event, although our cognitive interpretation of the external event can cause an internal response that we often describe as stress. Managing stress can be accomplished by either *decreasing* the external pressures that are placed upon us or by *increasing* our internal resources for responding to the external events. Organizational psychologists have shown that the following strategies can be useful managing stress.

Use effective problem-solving. Problems are stressors, and resolving them helps eliminate the stress triggered by them. Effective problem solvers identify problems, generate alternative solutions, select the optimal solutions, and evaluate outcomes after implementation. Problem solving skills involve defining problems clearly, approaching problems logically, obtaining adequate information, finding workable solutions, considering alternatives, choosing an option, determining consequences, and evaluating the results of one's actions. Successful problem solving often translates into successful stress management.

Distinguish between urgency and importance. Think of tasks and goals as fitting into one of the following four categories: (a) tasks that are both urgent and important, which have to be done today, (b) tasks that are important but not urgent (long term goals), (c) tasks that are urgent but not important (some phone calls), and (d) tasks that are neither urgent or important (spam, junk mail). Long term goals are achieved most effectively by focusing on tasks that are important but not urgent. Prioritize tasks depending on their importance---not their urgency.

Keep your life organized. Keep your daily life as simple, organized, and uncomplicated as you

can. Be neat and orderly about your appearance, belongings, appointments, and your work. The more organized you are, the less you will waste time and energy, which are your most valuable resources. Increased organization results in decreased stress.

Learn to let go and delegate tasks. Asking others to do tasks that are rightfully theirs is a key to freeing you of details, but it may take some ingenuity on your part. You must be willing to (a) take time to fully explain what must be done, (b) train others to do the job well, (c) permit them to make some errors while they are learning, and (d) check over their work later. Effective delegation is one of the ways successful businesses operate, and if you learn to delegate, it will save you considerable time. In addition, put aside some money to delegate work to specialists whenever you can. What may take you hours to accomplish can be done in minutes by an expert.

Reserve a quiet time for yourself each day. Set aside a period at home or at the office when you can be absolutely alone. Close your door, turn off your phone, and make yourself as relaxed as possible. The classroom of silence may give you an opportunity to do your best thinking, and a chance to tackle questions that require your most serious planning. During this time, don't dive headlong into your task. Instead, put your feet up, keep your mind calm, and free-associate for a while about things on your mind. Jot down notes on thoughts as they come. Make it a habit to do this for part of each day, for a minimum of 20 minutes.

Surround yourself with supportive people. Spend as much time as you can with people who are cheerful, outgoing, and uplifting. Don't associate with people who are gloomy or pessimistic, since these people can influence

your mood in a downward direction more than you realize. Try to do something sociable every day, such as having a cup of coffee with a valued co-worker or friend.

Get as many sensory pleasures as you can.

Wear comfortable clothes, seek pleasant surroundings, eat tasty foods, watch a beautiful sunset, listen to good music, smell sweet fragrances, take warm baths, and make love with your mate. Stimulate all of your senses and enjoy as much sensory pleasure as you can. In other words, lose your mind and come to your senses. Look forward to these moments of small pleasures in which you can momentarily forget your worries and responsibilities.

Take good care of a pet. If you don't already have a pet, consider buying one and taking care of it. Many people are distracted from themselves in a healthy direction by a dog or cat they own and love. Some studies have shown that talking to a pet can help lower blood pressure and reduce stress. Other research studies have shown that simply owning a pet can increase life expectancy following the death of a spouse.

Keep yourself healthy. Keep in good physical shape by eating and sleeping adequately. Begin a new exercise program and stick to it. Research studies have shown that even 20 minutes of brisk walking every day can make a difference in your mental and physical functioning. Studies in the field of psychoneuroimmunology have shown that too much stress can cause physical illness.

Exercise regularly. If you're in reasonably good health, do something physically strenuous each day. Many people have found that jogging or even brisk walking results in an elevation in mood and a reduction in depression. Physiological psychologists have demonstrated that muscle actions release certain neurotransmitters in the brain, which in turn

reduce internal stress, elevate mood, and improve mental functioning.

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