



CareHere!

MANAGE YOUR STRESS

BALANCE YOUR LIFE

Stress is a normal physical and emotional reaction to the pressures of life. Stress is personal and unique - what stresses one person may not affect another. When you feel the demands of a situation are greater than the coping skills you possess, you become stressed. A small amount of stress can be beneficial and motivating. However, when stress becomes a daily challenge, your health can suffer.

Why is stress management important?

When you perceive a situation as stressful, your brain sets off an alarm system that prepares your body to “fight-or-flight.” Messages are sent to areas of the brain that control fear, mood, and motivation. The body releases hormones that increase heart rate, raise blood pressure, and increase sugars in the bloodstream for the body to use as energy.

When the situation is over, the chemical reaction ends. The body turns off its alarm system, returning to its pre-stressed state. However, if you don’t manage your stress regularly, the chemical reaction does not end. The body remains flooded with stress hormones which may add to or worsen a range of health problems - physically, emotionally and mentally.

Prolonged stress may lead to various health conditions:

On the Body	On Mood	On Behavior
Headache	Anxiety	Overeating or undereating
Muscle tension or pain	Restlessness	Angry outbursts
Chest pain	Lack of motivation	Drug or alcohol abuse
Fatigue Sleep problems	Irritability or anger	Tobacco use
Stomach upset	Sadness or depression	Social withdrawal

What is stress management?

Everyone has a toolbox that contains coping skills (tools). Stress management helps you gain new coping skills or improve the ones you already have to reset your alarm system. It can help your mind and body adapt to stressful situations.

First, it's important to identify your triggers. What makes you feel anxious, irritable, or tense? Work, relationship problems or financial concerns can be easy to identify. But daily annoyances, such as traffic or waiting in a long line, may add to stress levels as well.

Next, recognize how you experience stress. For instance, someone who gets an upset stomach when stressed may experience stomach tightness when he/she first feels stress. A person who develops a migraine because of stress may notice neck and shoulder tension as the first signal. Recognizing the feelings and thoughts of early stress in your body can help you feel a greater sense of self-control.

Last, find the coping skills that work best for you. Not all coping skills will work for everyone or every situation. Have patience in trying different tools to see which are the best fit for you. Consider one of the following coping skills the next time you find yourself in a stressful situation.

- **Keep a Journal** – Recording your thoughts and feelings through writing releases stress.
- **Choose a Hobby and Make Time for It** – As a break from reality, hobbies are excellent stress reducers.
- **Practice Deep Breathing and Counted Breathing** – Taking deep, focused breaths from your abdomen can have a soothing effect on your body when you are stressed and help you achieve a new point of view.
- **Keep an Ongoing Task List** – Listing and prioritizing tasks can help you feel more organized and in control of the things you need to do.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is key in helping to manage stress. Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. Make a conscious effort to spend less time with electronics and more time relaxing. Get a massage, soak in a bubble bath, read a book, listen to music—whatever you find helpful!

References:

Ray, O (2004) American Psychologist; Mayo Clinic (n.d.) <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/basics/stress-relief/hlv-20049495> , Cannon, C (2016) Stress Management SOC (2016).

If you would like to work with a CareHere Health Coach on making healthy lifestyle changes, please contact the Patient Support Center at 877.423.1330 to schedule an appointment.