

An illustration of a hand reaching up from a pile of papers. The hand is light orange and is wearing a black sleeve with two white buttons. Above the hand is an orange speech bubble with the word 'HELP!' in white capital letters. The background is a blue gradient.

HELP!

STRESS MANAGEMENT

----- Young Adults -----

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What is Stress Management?

Stress management is a set of techniques and activities intended to help individuals deal with stress effectively in their everyday lives by identifying and examining individual stressors and taking positive actions to minimize their effects. However, it does not mean to mitigate stress completely as stress can play a protective role against threat or other circumstances. Therefore, the idea is to balance the amount of stress one is in.

What is Stress?

Stress is the psychological, physiological and behavioral response of an individual when they perceive a lack of equilibrium between the demands placed upon them and their ability to meet those demands, which over time can result in ill health.



Symptoms of Stress

Although we all experience stress differently, some common symptoms include:

- Difficulty sleeping;
- Weight gain or weight loss;
- Stomach pain;
- Irritability;
- Teeth grinding;
- Panic attacks;
- Headaches;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Sweaty hands or feet;
- Heartburn;
- Excessive sleeping;
- Social isolation;
- Fatigue;
- Nausea;
- Feeling overwhelmed;
- Obsessive or compulsive behaviors.



7 Tips for Stress Management



Understand your stress

How do you stress? It can be different for everybody. By understanding what stress looks like for you, you can be better prepared, and reach for your stress management toolbox when needed.



Identify your stress sources

What causes you to be stressed? Be it work, family, change or any of the other potential triggers.



Learn to recognize stress signals

We all process stress differently so it's important to be aware of your individual stress symptoms. What are your internal alarm bells? Low tolerance, headaches, stomach pains or a combination from the above 'Symptoms of stress'.



Recognize your stress strategies

What is your go-to tactic for calming down? These can be behaviors learned over years and sometimes aren't the healthy option. For example, some people cope with stress by self-medicating with alcohol or overeating.

7 Tips for Stress Management



Implement healthy stress management strategies

It's good to be mindful of any current unhealthy coping behaviors so you can switch them out for a healthy option. For example, if overeating is your current go to, you could practice meditation instead, or decide to phone a friend to chat through your situation.



Make self-care a priority

When we make time for ourselves, we put our well-being before others. This can feel selfish to start, but it is like the airplane analogy—we must put our own oxygen mask on before we can assist others. The simplest things that promote well-being, such as enough sleep, food, downtime, and exercise are often the ones overlooked.

Self-care is group-care.



Ask for support when needed

If you're feeling overwhelmed, reach out to a friend or family member you can talk to. Speaking with a healthcare professional can also reduce stress and help us learn healthier coping strategies.

Action-Oriented Approaches

1. **Be assertive:** Clear and effective communication is the key to being assertive. When we're assertive, we can ask for what we want or need, and explain what is bothering us. The key is doing this in a fair and firm manner while still having empathy for others. Once you identify what you need to communicate, you can stand up for yourself and be proactive in altering the stressful situation.
2. **Reduce the noise:** Switching off all the technology, screen time, and constant stimuli can help us slow down. How often do you go offline? It is worth changing, for your own sake.
3. **Make time for some quietness** each day. You may notice how all those seemingly urgent things we need to do become less important and crisis-like. That to-do list will be there when you're in a place to return to it. Remember that recharging is a very effective way of tackling stress.
4. **Manage your time:** If we let them, our days will consume us. Before we know it, the months have become overwhelmingly busy. When we prioritize, organize our tasks and set goals we create a less stressful and more enjoyable life.
5. **Create boundaries:** Boundaries are the internal set of rules that we establish for ourselves. They outline what behaviors we will and won't accept, how much time and space we need from others, and what priorities we have. Healthy boundaries are essential for a stress-free life. When we have healthy boundaries, we respect ourselves and take care of our well-being by clearly expressing our boundaries to others.
6. **Get out of your head:** Sometimes it's best not to even try contending with the racing thoughts. Sometimes you just need a break. Distract yourself. Watch a movie, phone or catch up with a friend, go for a walk, or do something positive that you know takes your mind off things.

Emotion-Oriented Approaches

1. **Affirmations and imagery:** The power of positive imagery and affirmations is now scientifically proven to increase positive emotion. When you think of a positive experience, your brain perceives it to be a reality. So, replace those negative thoughts with positive statements and challenge and change the way you see and experience the world.
2. **Cognitive Restructuring:** Cognitive restructuring is a useful technique for understanding unhappy feelings and moods, and for challenging the sometimes-wrong "automatic beliefs" that can lie behind them. As such, you can use it to reframe the unnecessary negative thinking that we all experience from time to time. Bad moods are unpleasant, they can reduce the quality of your performance, and they undermine your relationships with others. Cognitive restructuring helps you to change the negative or distorted thinking that often lies behind these moods. As such, it helps you approach situations in a more positive frame of mind.
3. **ABC Technique:** The letters ABC stand for; A – adversity, or the stressful event. B – beliefs, or the way that you respond to the event. Then C – consequences, the result of your beliefs lead to the actions and outcome of that event. Essentially, the more optimistic your beliefs, the more positive the outcome.

The following pages explain the two techniques mentioned above.



Cognitive Restructuring

Step 1: Calm Yourself

If you're upset or stressed by the thoughts you want to explore, you may find it hard to concentrate on using the tool. Use meditation or deep breathing to calm yourself down if you feel particularly stressed or upset.

Step 2: Identify the Situation

Start by describing the situation that triggered your negative mood.

Step 3: Analyze Your Mood

Next, write down the mood, or moods, that you felt during the situation.

Here, moods are the fundamental feelings that we have, but they are not thoughts about the situation. An easy way to distinguish moods from thoughts: you can usually describe moods in one word, while thoughts are more complex.

For example, "He disregarded my suggestion in front of my co-workers" would be a thought, while the associated moods might be humiliation, frustration, anger, or insecurity.

Step 4: Identify Automatic Thoughts

Now, write down the natural reactions, or "automatic thoughts," you experienced when you felt the mood. In the example above, your thoughts might be:

- "Maybe my analysis skills aren't good enough."
- "Have I failed to consider these things?"
- "He hasn't liked me since..."
- "He's so rude and arrogant!"
- "No one likes me."
- "But my argument is sound."
- "This undermines my future with this company."

In this example, the most distressing thoughts are likely to be "Maybe my analysis skills aren't good enough," and, "No one likes me."

Step 5: Find Objective Supportive Evidence

Identify the evidence that objectively supports your automatic thoughts. In our example, you might write the following:

- "The meeting moved on and decisions were made, but my suggestion was ignored."
- "He identified a flaw in one of my arguments."

Your goal is to look objectively at what happened, and then to write down specific events or comments that led to your automatic thoughts.

Step 6: Find Objective Contradictory Evidence

Next, identify and write down evidence that contradicts the automatic thought. In our example, this might be:

- "The flaw was minor and did not alter the conclusions."
- "The analysis was objectively sound, and my suggestion was realistic and well-founded."
- "I was top of my class when I trained in the analysis method."
- "My clients respect my analysis, and my opinion."

As you can see, these statements are fairer and more rational than the reactive thoughts.



Step 7: Identify Fair and Balanced Thoughts

By this stage, you've looked at both sides of the situation. You should now have the information you need to take a fair, balanced view of what happened.

If you still feel uncertain, discuss the situation with other people, or test the question in some other way.

When you come to a balanced view, write these thoughts down. The balanced thoughts in this example might now include:

- "I am good at this sort of analysis. Other people respect my abilities."
- "My analysis was reasonable, but not perfect."
- "There was an error, but it didn't affect the validity of the conclusions."
- "The way he handled the situation was not appropriate."
- "People were surprised and a little shocked by the way he handled my suggestion." (This comment would have followed an informal conversation with other people at the meeting.)



Step 8: Monitor Your Present Mood

You should now have a clearer view of the situation, and you're likely to find that your mood has improved. Write down how you feel.

Next, reflect on what you could do about the situation. (By taking a balanced view, the situation may cease to be important, and you might decide that you don't need to take action.)

Finally, create some positive affirmations that you can use to counter any similar automatic thoughts in the future.

Use the template on the next page record these thoughts.

Thought Record

| Situation | Thoughts | Emotions | Behaviors | Alternative Thought |
|--|--|------------------|--|--|
| <u>For example:</u> <i>Everyone's busy, so I'm spending an evening alone with no plans.</i> | <i>No one wants to hang out with me. I'm just wasting my life, sitting here alone.</i> | <i>Depressed</i> | <i>Stayed home all night and did nothing. Just sat around having bad thoughts.</i> | <i>I'm alone tonight, but everyone is alone from time to time. I can do whatever I want!</i> |
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ABC Technique

Step 1: Track Your Inner Dialog

Begin by keeping a diary for several days. Your goal is to listen to your inner dialog, especially when you encounter a stressful or difficult situation.

For each situation, write down the adversity you experienced, the beliefs you formed after encountering the adversity, and the consequences of those beliefs.

Consequences can be anything, from happy or unhappy thoughts and feelings, to specific actions that you took.

Example

Adversity: A colleague criticized my product idea in front of the team during our weekly meeting.

Belief: She's right; it was a dumb idea. I don't have much of an imagination, and now the entire team can see how uncreative I am. I should never have spoken up!

Consequences: I felt stupid and didn't speak up for the rest of the meeting. I don't want to attend any of the other team meetings this week and have already made an excuse to avoid tomorrow's meeting.

Step 2: Analyze Results

Once you've written down several ABC situations, take a look at what you have found.

Here, you need to look for patterns in your thinking, specifically, how any broad beliefs have led to specific consequences.

To be optimistic, you need to change your beliefs following adversity. This, in turn, leads to more positive consequences.

Step 3: Use Distraction and Disputation

Distraction

If you want to interrupt your negative thoughts, you need to distract yourself. Simply telling yourself "not to think negatively" isn't going to work, you need to interrupt the cycle.

To do this, try distracting yourself when you start creating negative beliefs.

For example, you could wear a rubber band around your wrist. After you've gone through a stressful situation, and when you begin to formulate negative thoughts and beliefs as a result, snap the rubber band against your skin. This physical sting will remind you to step out of the cycle of negative thinking.

Once you've interrupted your negative thoughts, you need to shift your attention somewhere else. Concentrate intently on something else for a minute.

Disputation

Although distraction is useful for interrupting negative thinking, a more permanent solution is to dispute them. Think of Disputation as a "D" after ABC.

To dispute your negative thoughts and beliefs, you argue with yourself rationally. In particular, you look for the mistaken assumptions about your explanatory style that we talked about earlier.

We'll use the previous example to illustrate this technique, below.

Adversity: A colleague criticized my product idea in front of the team during our weekly meeting.

Belief: She's right; it was a dumb idea. I don't have much of an imagination, and now the entire team can see how uncreative I am. I should never have spoken up!

Consequences: I felt stupid and didn't speak up for the rest of the meeting. I don't want to attend any of the other team meetings this week and have already made an excuse to avoid tomorrow's meeting.

Disputation: I'm blowing this out of proportion. My colleague had every right to criticize my idea; it was nothing personal, and her critique was spot on. She even commended my creative thinking once the meeting was over. All I need to do is think my ideas through a bit better next time.