

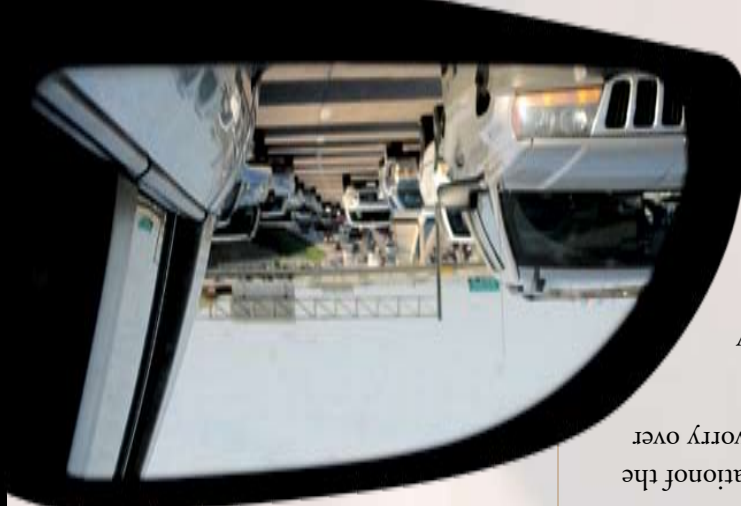


REVIEW YOUR LIST.
Are there problems you can simply solve, eliminating them? Others may be beyond your control — except that if you change your attitude about them, they may bother you less. As you read through the stress management skills inside, think about which skills might help you deal with your stressors.

- STRESSORS**
- financial problems
 - too much driving
 - worry about children
 - health problems
 - pressure at work
 - not enough exercise
 - lousy diet
 - personal relationship issues
 - overweight
 - working too many hours
 - caretaking an elder
 - no quiet time
 - conflict with co-worker
 - bored with routine
 - conflict with family member
 - noisy environment
 - sexual problems
 - nobody to talk to
 - other

Stress Symptoms...

- upset stomach
 - trouble sleeping
 - accidents and injuries
 - tight chest or throat
 - backaches
 - constipation
 - headaches
 - exhaustion
 - grumpy
 - tense
 - impatient
 - hopeless
 - hostile
 - easily upset
 - no pleasure in pastimes
 - lonely
 - depressed
 - excessive drinking
 - poor eating habits
 - driving too fast
 - drug use
 - getting into arguments
 - becoming a loner
 - working too much
 - criticizing others a lot
- PHYSICAL**
- trouble concentrating
 - difficulty making decisions
 - forgetfulness
 - scary thoughts
 - making errors
 - repetitive thoughts
 - grumpy
 - tense
 - impatient
 - hopeless
 - hostile
 - easily upset
 - no pleasure in pastimes
 - lonely
 - depressed
- EMOTIONAL**
- BEHAVIORAL**



But everyone can benefit by learning stress-reduction techniques and using them in their daily lives.

Why Joe isn't sick

Ever wonder why some people catch all the colds that go around, and others don't? In one study, researchers took 276 healthy volunteers and measured their stress levels, then put cold viruses in their noses.

- People who had been under severe stress for 1 to 6 months were twice as likely to get sick.
- Those with more than two years of stress were four times more likely to develop colds.
- Those with the most relationships — family, friends, and community — were the least likely to catch the cold.
- Stress about intimate relationships doubled cold risk.

Me? Stressed?

Diving home from work with 18 minutes to get to the school program and traffic has slowed to a crawl. Thoughts are racing:

“What do we have for dinner? I've got to call Mel... AND get the laundry started or I'll be up late tonight! What did she mean by “that new procedure” was going to be a challenge? Does she think I can't do it? They say it may freeze. Are the hoses disconnected?”

The driver is experiencing stress from several sources:

- **ENVIRONMENT** — Traffic, pollution, noise, and weather
- **SOCIAL** — Job pressures, family demands, social obligations
- **PHYSICAL** — Lack of sleep, possible poor diet
- **MENTAL** — Interpretation of the supervisor's comment, worry over being late

We all experience stress every day, but people vary in how they handle it. Some people thrive on change, getting a new job, moving or additional responsibilities. Others are upset by changes in their routines.

Stress & Health

LONG-TERM STRESS is Bad for Your Health

Some experts think that stress may cause 50% of all disease. Stress contributes to the first and second leading causes of death — heart disease and cancer. It's also a factor in migraines, digestive problems, mental illness, chronic insomnia, fatigue, high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, ulcers, tooth decay, and the common cold.

We're not talking about one incident. It's chronic stress — day in, day out — which can harm your immune system, making you more prone to accidents, illness, and plain old unhappiness.

Many of us have come to accept stress as normal — doesn't everyone complain about how busy they are? That doesn't make it okay. Take a look at your stress levels, what causes your stress, and what you can do about it.

For More Information

International Stress Management Association
www.isma.org.uk

National Mental Health Association
1 (800) 969-6642
www.nmha.org

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Coping With STRESS

Chronic stress may be the ultimate risk factor — some experts think it causes 50% of all disease. Evaluate your own stress, and learn some ways to reduce stress in your life.



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Stress Management Skills

Adjust Your Attitude

ACCEPTANCE

You'd never design the world this way. If you had the power, you'd change all sorts of things — at work, about yourself and family members, in your community and the world. Sort out which problems you can solve, and which are truly beyond your control. Work on accepting the things you can't change. Learn to mentally say, "Oh, well. So it goes."

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

"How could she do this to me again?" If you find yourself angry at the same situations over and over, maybe it's time to look at your expectations. A co-worker who is always late with her work is unlikely to change. Can you learn from experience, and plan around her? If your son would rather read than play basketball, can you give up your dreams of him in the NBA? You can save a lot of stress and conflict by being realistic.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

"I'll never get this right." Negative self-talk tends to come true — or at least make life a lot harder. Be your own coach. Tell yourself "If I keep at this, I'll figure it out." Encourage your family and co-workers — positive attitudes are contagious.

THE BIG PICTURE

Take a step back from problems. Ask yourself: Will this matter in a year? What do other people do when they have this problem? Is this something time may help?

RECOGNIZE CHOICES

We get in the habit of thinking that we have to live with things as they are. Think again. Do you actually have a choice? Could you speak up, or change things, or say no, or stop? Could you ask someone else to do it? Be honest with yourself, even if you don't choose to change the situation.

Work It Out!

Exercise is probably the simplest, most popular stress-reliever and antidepressant available. Aerobic exercise for half an hour several times a week does great things for your mood, your heart, and your waistline. It reduces the risk of many diseases and produces endorphins, natural brain chemicals that make you feel good and decrease pain.

The easiest way to get started is with brisk walking outdoors or on a treadmill. As your fitness improves, you may want to try jogging, bicycling, swimming, aerobics classes, or cross-country skiing. See your doctor before starting on a fitness program.

The Art Of Relaxation

You'll get much better at relaxing if you practice regularly. Pick a method or two and get good at it!

DEEP BREATHING

You can do this almost anywhere, anytime. The trick is to remember to do it! Inhale through your nose as you count to four. Let your abdomen expand. Exhale slowly through your mouth as you count to eight, letting tension leave your body with your breath. Repeat for a minute or two. Your muscles will relax, and your cells will perk up from the extra oxygen. Repeat whenever you feel tense.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Sit or lie down in a quiet place and tense, then relax each muscle group in your body — even your face. Then breathe slowly and deeply for a few minutes. Audio tapes which guide you may be helpful — find them at bookstores.

MEDITATION

Sit quietly, close your eyes, and

relax your body. Silently repeat a pleasant word like "relax." When thoughts come, let them go and return to repeating your word. Continue for 10 or 20 minutes. Stop repeating the word. Sit quietly for another minute or two, open your eyes, and feel refreshed.

STRETCHING EXERCISES

Tense muscles really appreciate a stretch. Here are a few you can do in a chair.

FINGERS: Separate and stretch out your fingers for 10 seconds. Curl your fingers at the knuckles and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat first stretch.

SHOULDERS: Lift your shoulders toward your ears and hold a few seconds, then relax.

FOREARMS: Extend one arm straight out, palm up. Gently bend back the extended hand with your other hand.

NECK: Tilt your head to one side and hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat on other side.

UPPER BACK: Clasp your hands behind your head, elbows out, and squeeze your shoulder blades together for 10 seconds. Relax.

This isn't a complete body stretch; ask your doctor for a booklet on stretching, or check out a book or video from the library for more great stretches.

YOGA: Yoga can improve circulation and memory and lower blood pressure and heart rate. The exercises revitalize your inner organs and stretch your muscles and spine. Most classes combine physical exercises, breathing exercises, and meditation.

WALKING: Nature is truly a great healer, and walking has tremendous health benefits. In a recent study, brisk walking for at least a half hour only six times a month reduced the death rate of participating adults by 43%. To step out into nature and notice the plants and trees is to rejoin the original health club. With no monthly fee!

MASSAGE THERAPY: A few decades ago, nurses routinely offered hospital patients massages, which increase the circulation of blood and lymph, reduce muscle tension, swelling and inflammation, relieve pain, and promote recovery from surgery. Massage therapy has moved out of the hospital and into more mainstream use to help people recover from injuries and from the stresses of increasingly busy lives. Look for a licensed massage therapist.

All You Need Is Love

The research keeps coming in — people with good social connections, and plenty of them, enjoy better health. It works both ways. People who suffer loneliness and isolation are two to five times more likely to die prematurely, and those who say they feel loved have less serious health problems, even when they have other high risk factors. Some research results:

- People with close relationships recover faster from injury and illness.
- Heart disease patients who reported that they felt the most loved and supported had less coronary artery blockage than others.
- Women with breast cancer who joined support groups had better long-term survival rates.
- Having a friend with you at a stressful event can lower your blood pressure and heart rate.
- Pet owners with heart disease are less likely to die early than those without pets.
- Heart disease is less likely in people with many social contacts.

- Touching can reduce irregular heartbeats.
- Volunteer workers have reduced mortality rates.
- Retirees who said their lives had improved since retiring had an average of 16 friends. Unsatisfied retirees averaged less than 10.
- People who have a large circle of friends catch fewer colds.

The take home lessons? Nurture your relationships with friends and loved ones. Share your feelings, and ask how they're doing and really listen. You don't need to solve their problems — just acknowledge them.

- Volunteer to help others — at the animal shelter, as a Big Brother, at the homeless shelter, the PTA, local film festival, church, hospital, nursing home, literacy program, or hospice.
- Get a pet if you haven't got one. They love and need you unconditionally.
- Prayer, meditation, being in nature, even gardening can help you experience nurturing spiritual connections.

Sleep

In the early part of the century, people slept about 9 hours a night. These days most of us average only 6-7 hours. Mood, memory, and your ability to pay attention and make good decisions take a nose dive as sleep deficits grow. It's downright dangerous — 23% of us admitted to falling asleep at the wheel in the past year. Make yourself get to bed at a reasonable hour.

If you have trouble sleeping, try these suggestions:

- Program your body clock by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine in the late afternoon and evening.
- Get outside in the daylight every day.
- Don't use sleep aids containing antihistamines.
- Keep a cool bedroom. 60-65° F is ideal.
- Exercise regularly for longer, deeper sleep.
- Remove the TV — reserve the bedroom for sleep only.
- Eat a light carbohydrate snack before bed. Cinnamon toast, anyone?
- Move your bedside clock out of sight, especially if it's illuminated.
- Create a "nesting ritual" at bedtime, perhaps including a warm bath or soft music to prepare you for sleep.
- If you can't fall asleep after a half hour, get up and leave the bedroom until you feel sleepy.
- See your doctor if you have chronic trouble sleeping or are drowsy in the daytime. A diagnosis of the underlying cause is important, and treatments are available.



Do Things You Enjoy

REMEMBER HOW GOOD IT FEELS TO . . .

- shoot hoops
- play an instrument
- sing in a choir
- do crafts
- play catch
- grow vegetables in your garden
- read stories to kids
- listen to music
- spend an evening with a friend
- watch a favorite old movie
- bake cookies
- take a bath
- read a good book
- go dancing
- take a hike
- wrestle with the kids
- set up a bird feeder
- play cards
- take an art class
- have a steam or hot tub

No matter how busy you are, you need to have some pleasure in your life, or it begins to lose meaning. Schedule some fun!

Manage Money Better

In a recent survey, 41% of workers said they felt pressure from personal financial worries. If this is a persistent source of your stress, do something about it.

CREDIT CARD DEBT

The more you owe on your credit card, the less of your payment pays for what you bought. It's worth some sacrifice to bring down your debt, so your money goes towards stuff you need, not interest. Here's how:

MAKE THOSE PAYMENTS ON TIME. Many cards can increase your interest rate if you're late a couple of times — the last thing you need.

PAY ALL, OR AS MUCH AS YOU CAN. Minimum monthly payments on many major cards are only about 2% of what you owe. It will take years to pay them off at that rate, and if you keep using the card meanwhile, your debt is guaranteed to grow.

PAY OFF THE DEBT WITH THE HIGHEST INTEREST RATE FIRST. Then attack the debt with the next highest rate.

CALL YOUR CREDIT CARD COMPANY. Ask for a lower rate. If you've got a good payment history, you may qualify for a lower promotional rate.

USE YOUR INCOME TAX REFUND, BONUSES OR WINDFALLS TO PAY OFF DEBT. This is a golden opportunity — don't blow it!

Consult a credit counselor if you are "in over your head."

Feel Like You're Getting Somewhere

SET GOALS. People can withstand enormous stress for a good cause. Think of the people you admire. Has life always been easy for them? They've gotten through the hard parts because they kept their purpose in mind.

On the other hand, life can seem pretty meaningless if you're just going through the motions, bored and going nowhere.

What are your goals and dreams? Are you moving towards them?

Take an hour and write down your goals, from the most humble to the most important. Think of small steps you could take to move towards what you want. Make plans and follow through. Extra work does not always mean extra stress, if it makes your dreams come true.

