

Handling Stress

Are you feeling a little stressed about something? Maybe can't sleep, eat or concentrate? According to the American Psychiatric Association, one-third of Americans are living with extreme stress.

Some short-term stress can be positive – causing us to deal constructively with daily problems or meet challenge or deadlines. But, when stress remains long-term – chronically or continuously – it can be damaging both emotionally and physically.

What can be done about stress in our lives? First, identify what is causing the stress. Consider whether your stressors are:

- Major or minor (e.g., lost keys or lost job),
- Temporary or permanent (e.g., giving a speech or a poor marriage relationship),
- Relational (e.g., uncomfortable living situation or stressful work relationship), or
- Internal (e.g., unrealistic expectations, or low self-esteem or self-criticism).

Once you have identified the causes, it may be easier to choose ways to help alleviate the stress.

When you need to deal with stress on the spot, try these strategies:

- Count to 10 before you speak.
- Take 3 to 5 slow, deep breaths
- Go for a walk
- Say "I am sorry" if you made a mistake
- Begin the day by breaking bigger problems down into smaller ones.

Often when a person is stressed, they either tend to eat too much or not eat at all. Eating a healthy diet which includes when stressed is important. Include fruits and vegetables and whole grains. Also choose lean meats and nuts. Eat less refined foods, sugars, and saturated fats.

Have a healthy attitude. Most people who are resilient to stress do two important things, they focus on immediate issues, what needs to be done right now, and they have an optimistic attitude, assuming their troubles are temporary rather than permanent.

Find enjoyment in life. Doing things you enjoy is a natural way to fight stress. Try to find one thing to do each day that you enjoy, even if it's just for 15 minutes.

Try to exercise to reduce stress. Walking or doing some type of exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week can help. Exercise not only keeps you in shape, but it also helps you relieve tension. It also helps you sleep better.

Try laughing more. Research suggests that laughter is really some of the best medicine. The experience of laughter can increase our physical, mental and emotional well-being. The benefits of

laughter can be documented when we consider how laughter serves to safeguard our health, to increase our ability to solve problems and help us with difficult situations.