

Stress Management Strategies

We all experience stress from time to time. Stress management is the ability to maintain control when situations, people, and events make excessive demands. What can you do to manage your stress? What are some strategies? We have included a list of strategies that may help you in managing your stress. You may already be doing some or all of these things.

Physical Exercise

Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage stress. Exercise will help to relax the muscles which become tense when you are stressed, and, as exercise increases the blood flow around the body, it can help you to think more clearly.

You do not have to take up a strenuous activity; anything that gets you moving around and is enjoyable is beneficial, especially if it involves spending at least half an hour in the fresh air every day.

Enjoyable Activities

You may feel that you're too busy to do things you enjoy. But making time to do something you enjoy can help you relax. It might also help you get more done in other areas of your life. You might like to spend time with family and friends, go out for dinner, participate in volunteer work or take up a hobby that you enjoy.

Deep Breathing

Often when we feel stressed our breathing becomes rapid and shallow. Deep breathing sends messages to the brain to begin calming the body. Practice will make your body respond more efficiently to deep breathing in the future. It helps to do deep breathing 2-5 minutes every night.

1. Breathe in slowly. Count in your head and make sure the inward breath lasts as least 5 second. Pay attention to the feeling of the air filling your lungs.
2. Hold your breath for 5-10 seconds (again, keep count). You don't want to feel uncomfortable, but it should last quite a bit longer than an ordinary breath.
3. Breathe out very slowly for 5 to 10 seconds (count). Pretend like you're breathing through a straw to slow yourself down.
4. Repeat the breathing process until you feel calm.

Imagery

Think about some of your favourite and least favourite places. Some induce stress and others fill us with a feeling of calm and relaxation. Our brain creates an emotional reaction just by thinking of these places so we don't need to be there. The imagery technique uses this to our advantage.

1. Make sure you're somewhere quiet without too much noise or distraction. You'll need a few minutes to just be in your head.
2. Think of a place or situation that you can go to and feel calm. Some examples might be the beach, relaxing at home, or going for a walk.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation teaches us to be aware of tension in our muscles so we can identify and address stress that we may not have even been aware of.

1. Find a quiet location. You should lie or sit down somewhere comfortable
2. The idea of this technique is to intentionally tense each muscle, and then to release the tension. Let's practice with your hands.
3. Tense the muscles in your fingers as hard as you can. This will make your hand go into a claw shape. Notice the feeling of tension in your hand. Hold this tension for 5 seconds.
4. Release the tension from your fingers. Let them relax. Notice how your fingers feel different after you release the tension.
5. Tense the muscles all throughout the hand to create a fist. Notice the feeling of the tension. Hold it for 5 seconds.
6. Release the tension from your fist and notice the feeling of relief in your hand.
7. Follow this pattern of tensing and releasing tension all throughout your body. Begin with your toes and move up through your feet, legs, buttocks, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, fingers, hands, neck, face and finally your whole body.