



DARING

DARE TO GIVE YOUR DREAMS WINGS

*How to identify, alleviate and prevent
stress and anxiety*



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For more tips and tricks check out my
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Stress

Stress is a natural part of life. A positive stress such as lifting progressively heavier weights challenges the body to deal with the stress applied by becoming stronger. However, negative stressors such as an injury, loss of a job, inability to participate in regular activities, or isolation from loved ones may send you in a downward spiral of depression and negativity. However, there are a few things that you can do to counter the effects of stress and stave off anxiety.

How stress is displayed physically and mentally.

Physiological and psychological responses to stress are divided into two categories: primary and secondary stress responses.

Primary stress responses

Pale skin allows for blood flow to be diverted to organs, heart begins to pound, breathing rate increases, muscles tense, sweat glands increase production to cool overheating muscles, and the liver begins to convert glycogen to blood sugar to give us a quick burst of energy. The body is preparing to execute the fight or flight response. If the body senses danger such as a bear chasing you, these processes will allow you to engage the "flight" component of the fight or flight response. Primary responses are not as dangerous if the stress is alleviated. However, if the stress continues over time, it leads to secondary stress responses.

Secondary stress responses

Decreased blood flow can lead to disease, increased heart rate may result in high blood pressure issues such as heart attack or stroke, digestive issues such as ulcers, blood thickens to carry more oxygen but overly oxygenated blood can cause blackouts, overly tense muscles can lead to strained muscles or tension headaches and a host of other aches and pains.

Warning signs of stress

Physical

prolonged or worsening headaches, muscle tensions, nausea, sweating, feeling hot, chest pain, sleeplessness, dizziness, stomach pain, getting ill easily

Behavioral

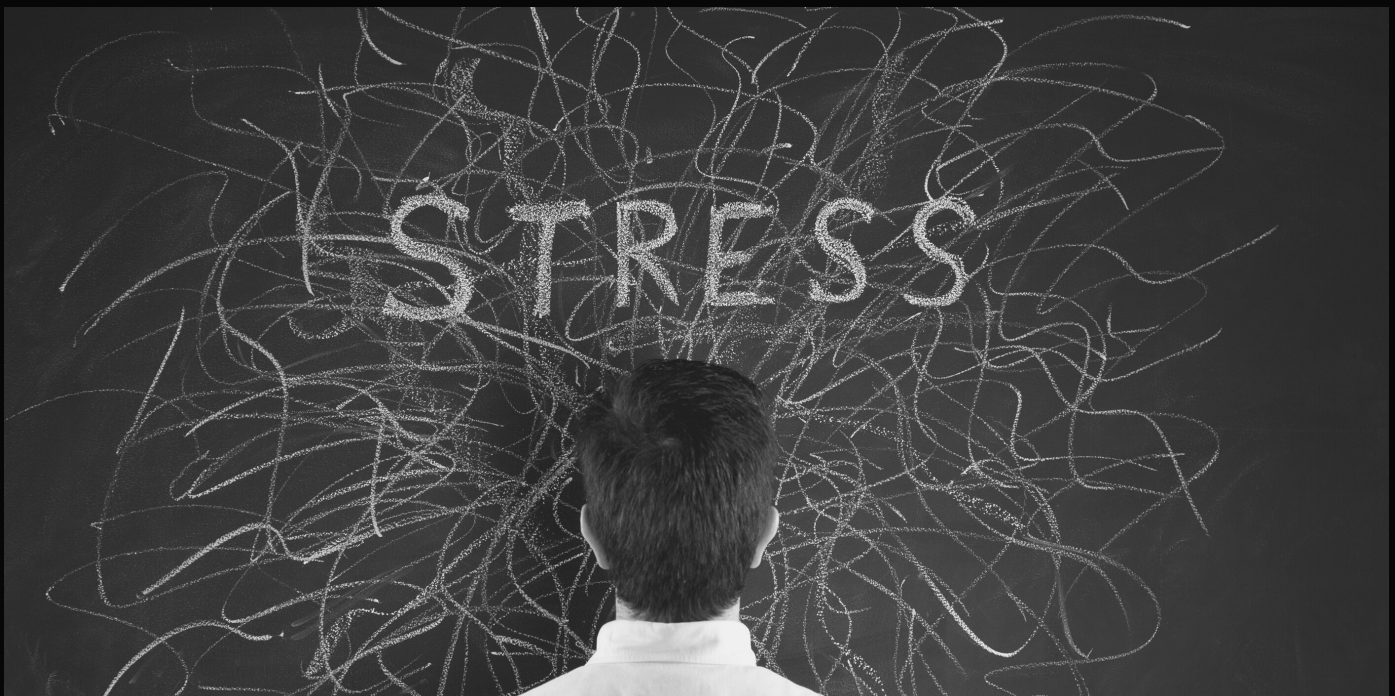
changes in appetite, impatience, low energy, change in sleep patterns, avoidance of certain places or situations, aggression or irritability, self-medicating with drugs or alcohol

Psychological

unable to make decisions, decreased creativity, feeling overly sensitive, negative thought patterns, fear of rejection, forgetfulness, thinking that everything is going wrong, inability to concentrate, loss of focus

Emotional

anxiety, panic attacks, sadness, low self-esteem, over-reaction, extreme feelings of anger, isolation, feelings of shame or guilt, withdrawal from normal activities, loss of libido



Ways to alleviate stress and anxiety

Create a Routine

Things are a little different now and you may be away from your normal work or school routine. Try to establish a daily routine to create a sense of normalcy. This means:

- having a regular bedtime and shower routine
 - having a dedicated work or school space
 - giving yourself regular "to do's" to keep you on track and feel more accomplished
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Decide what you can control

Make a list of the things that are causing you anxiety or stressing you out. Divide the list in two categories: controllables and uncontrollables. Focus only on the things that you can control right now. This should immediately make you feel empowered at what you can actually control and give you grace for what is not in your realm of control.

For example: we cannot control the weather but we can control how we dress.



Relieve stress in your body.

Just Breathe

How you breathe can immediately change your perceived stress and anxiety.

- 4-4-4 breathing technique: inhale for 4 count, hold for 4 count and exhale slowly for 4 count
- diaphragmatic breathing: place your hand on your stomach. Breathe deeply and feel the expansion of your belly. You should be able to see your hand rise and fall with each breath.

Find the tension

Scan your body for where you notice the most tension. For example: tightness in shoulders or pain in neck. Get comfortable and take your shoes off if possible. Really relax. Now, beginning at your feet, contract the muscles for a count of 10. Release the contraction in your feet and move up to contract your calves, then thighs, glutes, abdominals. Progress toward your upper body to contract muscles in your upper back, upper arms, then forearms. Hold each contraction for 10 then feel the stress leave your body as the contraction releases.

Visualize the ideal

Close your eyes and imagine your ideal day. What do you see, feel, and hear. Try to imagine this with the greatest amount of detail. Really feel that you are there. These things are in your control. How do you spend your day? What do you wear? What do you eat? What do you listen to, read, or watch on tv?

Write it down

While you may not be accustomed to journaling, writing down what is stressing you out is a way to let it go. If you journal it, write down what is stressing you out and 1-3 things that you can do right now to resolve the issue. However, it may help you to write the issues down and either burn the paper or shred it and dispose of it. The physical act of watching it go away may be enough to help you feel better especially about the things that you cannot control at this moment.

Exercise

Moving your body helps to disperse anxiety. A gentle walk tells your brain "everything is okay. There is no bear." There is no flight response needed because there is no threat here. I am just out for a walk.





Long term suggestions for stress management

- daily exercise (easy walks, yoga, or something that is fun to relieve pressure)
- find a hobby that you really enjoy
- journaling
- positive self-talk when you find negativity taking over your mind
- laugh (funny movie, Youtube video, or crazy Tik Tok dance)
- have a plan in place for when you expect to encounter stress such as finals, a job interview, tax preparation, or visiting difficult people

Unresolved stress can manifest as chronic pain or panic attacks. If you feel this way, you are not alone. I have personally encountered the long term effects of stress with sleep disturbances, panic attacks, digestive issues, ulcer pains, chronic headaches, etc. There are ways to better manage stress so that, while some events in life may be difficult, you have a toolbox of mental skills and physical interventions to help you feel better fast. Stress doesn't have to ruin your day.

For further questions or to work together on your mental skills, contact me. I would love to help you regain control of your stress levels !

Best wishes for a less stressed future,

Dr. Taffy Hawkins

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