# Coping with Stress

Stress Response

Our bodies have a preprogrammed way of responding to stress. When we perceive a threat, our bodies change from our neutral resting states. Hormones that increase heart rate and blood pressure are released. Our energy levels increase. Feelings like fear and anxiety may occur, or we may become irritable. Our digestion slows down. These responses have allowed people to survive throughout human history and are often collectively referred to as the fight or flight response. The stress response can be triggered by situations that are life threatening, as well as different types of situations that we may encounter on a daily basis: conflicts at work or school, in personal relationships, or even by what we see on social media.After a threat has passed and we feel safe again, the body returns to its neutral resting state until the next time it perceives a threat and the cycle begins again.
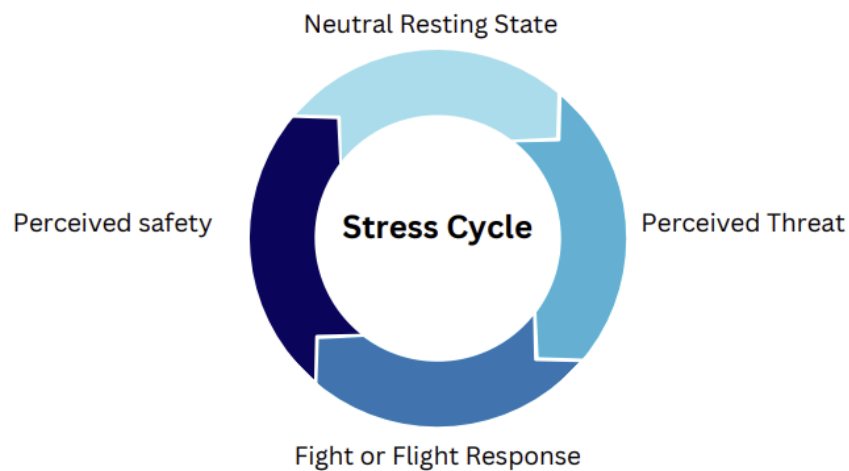
Problems occur when we don't complete the stress cycle and the fight or flight response stays activated. When this happens on a daily basis, the changes in our blood pressure and heart rate can lead to heart disease and chronic digestive problems. We might have trouble sleeping or experience chronic fatigue or exhaustion. There are some things we can do to help ourselves complete the stress cycle and, since we often experience stress on a daily basis, it
may be helpful to choose one or more of them to do every day. You can learn to recognize stress and with some practice, you can prevent it from taking over your emotions and your life.

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Tips for Coping with Stress and Completing the Stress Cycle

Read through the tips and try a few of them to see which ones work best for you.

1. Move your body - jog or power walk, do some cleaning or gardening, dance. Move your body in a way that works best for you. This helps break the stress connection and gets more oxygen circulating through your body.

2. Take several deep breaths. The 4-4-8 breathing pattern may be helpful: inhale through your nose for 4 seconds, hold the breath for 4 seconds, exhale through your mouth for 8 seconds. You can repeat for several minutes, as tolerated. (Check with your doctor first if you have any respiratory conditions. Stop and rest if you feel dizzy or lightheaded.)

3. Apps that help with relaxation, mindfulness, or living in the moment may be useful.

4. Get outdoors and go for a walk. Briefly getting away from the pressure with a change of scenery can help people let go of tension and negativity.

5. Listen to music that you enjoy. Turn up the music and dance 🪇

6. Connect with friends or family. If you can't be with them in person, give them a call.

7. Release the tension that stress causes in your muscles by soaking in a warm tub or by getting a massage.

8. Laugh. Humor is a good form of medicine. Watch something funny (even better if you can do this with a friend), or even a short, funny online video.

9. Journaling. Writing things down may help clarify your challenges and help you realize how to cope with frequent stressors.

10. Straighten up a closet, your purse, or a room in your house. Moving around helps release negativity and cleaning up clutter lessens the visual noise around us.

11. Go ahead and cry if you feel like it. This can provide a deep feeling of relief, even if it doesn't change the situation that created the stress.

12. Do something creative that you enjoy - sports, art, music, storytelling, etc.