

# Stress Management

## WHY focus on stress?

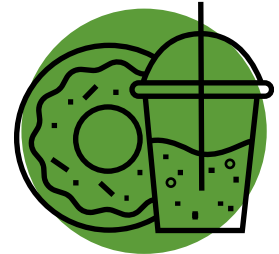
Research shows that stress increases our risk of **high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke**. It also **increases our bodies production of cortisol**, which is linked with weight gain and increased fat stored around our bellies. Stress can also interfere with our goals for healthy living and is linked to:



Emotional eating



Physical Inactivity



Eating less nutrient dense foods

## WHAT is stress?

**Stress is a natural reaction that occurs in response to a stressor or event.**

Even positive events can cause us stress! Stress is a normal part of life and means different things to different people. A certain level can keep our lives interesting, and provide motivation to overcome challenges. But too much stress, or long-term stress, can have negative impacts on our body and minds.

### SOURCES OF STRESS

#### Environmental

Temperature, humidity, noise, traffic, crowding

#### Social/Emotional

Family, relationships, isolation, anxiety

#### Physical

Fever, pain, illness, fatigue

#### Responsibility

Finances, work/school deadlines, projects

### RESPONSES TO STRESS

#### Cognitive

Memory problems, difficulty concentrating, negative thinking, worry

#### Behavioral

Eating more or less, physical inactivity, alcohol/tobacco use, isolation

#### Emotional

Moodiness, irritability, depression

#### Physical

Muscle tension, headaches, nausea

# HOW can I manage stress?

The way we react to stress, or manage stress, can have a significant impact on our well-being! Let's explore 4 steps to manage stress.

## Step 1: Evaluate Your Stress

Taking steps to prevent and manage your stress begins with understanding your stressors and response



**How often do I feel stressed?**

.....



**What kinds of things cause me to feel stressed?**

.....



**How do I respond to stress ?**

.....



**What are some of the ways I manage stress in my life, and are they helpful?**

.....



**How does stress impact my ability to make healthy choices?**

## Step 2: Anticipate Your Stress

Although some of life's stressful events happen suddenly, some we can predict! Once you've identified potential stressors, see if you can anticipate when they will happen next. Keep in mind that even events we look forward to can be stressful.

## Step 3: Prevent Stress

### **Practice saying no**

Set boundaries to protect your time and energy. Say yes when things align with your values!

### **Seek support**

Reach out to others and ask for help when you need it!

### **Set realistic goals**

Consider your commitments and what you can achieve in a reasonable amount of time.

### **Use planning and problem solving**

Identify the source of stress, brainstorm options, pick a solution, execute, evaluate, and revise if needed.

### **Keep things in perspective & maintain a positive attitude**

Reach out to others and ask for help when you need it!

### **Take a 10-minute time out**

If possible, remove yourself from the stress mentally or physically.

### **Prioritize the basics!**

Practice healthy eating behaviors, stay active (even 10 minutes can be helpful), and get adequate sleep.



## **Positive Mental Health and Heart Health**

Managing stress is good for your health and well being! According to the American Heart Association, positive psychological health is associated with lower risk of heart disease and death

### **Positive mental health characteristics:**

- Happiness
- Optimism
- Gratitude
- Sense of purpose
- Life satisfaction
- Mindfulness

### **Positive mental health is linked to:**

- Lower blood pressure
- Better glucose control
- Less inflammation
- Lower cholesterol

# Step 4: Manage Stress

Sometimes we can't anticipate or prevent stress. Depending on how you experience stress, different strategies, or a combination of them, can be helpful to manage it!

## RELIEVE GENERAL STRESS

- Deep breathing
- Child's pose
- Use problem solving
- Practice time management
- Get a good night's sleep



## RELIEVE PHYSICAL STRESS

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Try engaging in gentle movement
- Take a warm bath
- Use a stress ball



## RELIEVE EMOTIONAL STRESS

- Practice mindfulness
- Explore aromatherapy
- Find the humor--laughter boosts mood and relieves tension
- Listen to music



## RELIEVE BEHAVIORAL STRESS

- Get active with a class that you enjoy
- Prioritize positive coping skills and strategies
- Reach out to loved ones for support and accountability



## RELIEVE COGNITIVE STRESS

- Practice gratitude
- Meditate
- Talk back to negative thoughts
- Keep things in perspective
- Get active to give your brain a break
- Make a task list



# Stress Management Strategies

Below, we highlight just a handful of research-backed stress management strategies. As a reminder, we all experience stress differently, so we encourage you to **choose strategies that work best for YOU!**

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a practice based on ancient Buddhist philosophy, but has gained new attention over the past few decades due to its many benefits. There are two components to mindfulness:

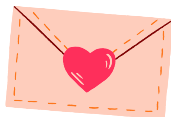
- **Focusing your attention** on your experience and the present moment
- **Adopting an open and accepting attitude** toward your experience



### **Mindfulness Exercise: Leaves on a Stream**

- Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes
- Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water
- For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf --let it flow by
- If your thoughts stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again.
- If your mind says things like "this is dumb" or "I'm not doing this right," place those thoughts on leaves as well and let them pass.
- From time to time, certain thoughts may distract you from this exercise. This is normal. When you realize you have become sidetracked, gently bring attention back to the stream.

## Gratitude



Regularly practicing gratitude is associated with reduced risk of heart disease and linked to mental and physical benefits.

**You can practice gratitude in a number of ways! Find what works best for you.**

- Keep a gratitude journal
- Identify what you are grateful for before you get out of bed
- Express gratitude to those in your life with a letter

## Physical Activity

Being active can help you relax! All it takes is finding the right activity to help you "get in the zone."

- Shooting hoops
- Playing tennis
- Swimming
- Walking
- Yoga
- Resistance training



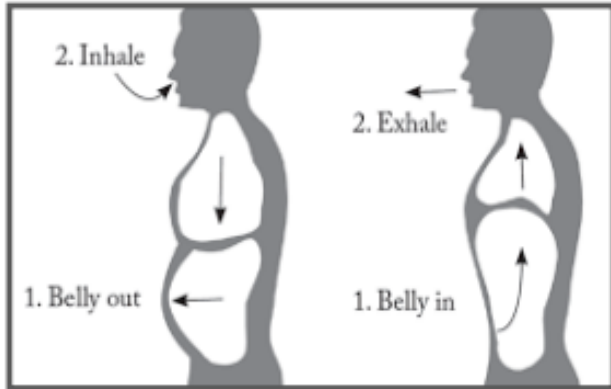
# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This techniques helps you monitor and control muscle tension occurring in your body as a response to stress.

**Check out this guided video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2wo2Impnfg>

## Deep Breathing

Deep breathing can slow our heart rate and lower our blood pressure!



1. Choose a comfortable and quiet place to lay down or sit
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest
3. Take a breath in through your nose and feel your belly inflate into your lower hand
4. Continue to breathe into your lungs so your chest begins to rise with your upper hand
5. Slowly release the air through your mouth and feel your chest and belly deflate
6. Attempt this practice for 10 breaths or 3-5 minutes

## Yoga/Meditation

A class is great, but sometimes holding a static pose can calm your central nervous system and provide physical/mental benefits. Sit in child's pose--Balasana--for a few minutes and concentrate on each inhale/exhale.



[yogadownload.com](http://yogadownload.com) // [yogajournal.com](http://yogajournal.com) // [everday-taichi.com](http://everday-taichi.com) // [meditationoasis.com](http://meditationoasis.com)  
// [breathe2relax app](https://breathe2relax.com) // [izen garden app](https://izen.com) //

## Set yourself up for **SUCCESS**

- ★ Continue to explore stressors in your life and how you react to them. This will help you select stress management strategies that can work for you!
- .....
- ★ Consider what self-care practice resonates with you and make the most sense for you to commit to this week
- .....
- ★ Share your intentions with a family member or friend for added accountability and support
- .....
- ★ Remember, to approach these actions with kindness and flexibility, knowing that progress takes time and effort!