



## Improve Your Health Through Better Stress Management

Learning how to manage stress helps us deal with how hectic life can be.  
Managing stress can help your body and mind.

### What is Stress?

**Stress** is a reaction to situations, events, or people. Stress can be in the form of a big project at work or having bills to pay. Stress impacts how your body and your mind feel on a daily basis.

When stress is good, it prepares you to meet a challenge. But when stress becomes too strong or lasts too long, it can start to negatively impact your health.

**High levels of negative stress have been linked to:**

- Headaches
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Heart Disease
- Sleep Problems
- Obesity
- Getting sick more easily
- Longer recovery time from illness

### **Unhealthy ways to cope with stress include:**

- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using other drugs
- Lashing out at others
- Eating comfort food

These may help us feel better for a short period of time but will likely make us feel even worse in the future.

## **Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress**

### **Deep Breathing:**

1. Sit comfortably in a chair and close your eyes.
2. Breathe in through your nose and inhale as fully as possible imagining there is a balloon in your stomach that you are trying to inflate.
3. Exhale very slowly through your mouth.
4. Repeat the deep cleansing breaths 10-20 times.

### **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:**

1. Lie down or sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Starting at the top of your body, slowly tighten your forehead muscles as much as you can, hold for 10 seconds, and then slowly release.
3. Move down your body, tightening and relaxing the different muscles one at a time.
4. Notice how your body feels when the muscles are relaxed.

### **Imagery:**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Try to imagine a place that is relaxing for you, such as a beach or a field.
3. Take a 'mind walk' to that place, taking in all the sights, sounds and scents.
4. Allow yourself 5 minutes to be in this place you love before coming back to reality.

### **Exercise:**

- Take a 10-minute walk during the day.
- Exercising 3 to 4 days a week can help you feel less stressed all the time.

### **Social Support:**

- Reach out to a friend or family member to talk about what is bothering you.
- You don't even have to talk about your stress; just spending time with people we love can help us feel more relaxed.

## Recognition, Acceptance, and Action:

There may be times when we have no control over things that cause us stress. However, we do have control over HOW we deal or cope with the stress.

When this happens:

- Recognize the stress is not in your control.
- Accept the things you can not change.
- Take action in a way that is healthy for you and your loved ones.

## Using Mindfulness to Cope with Stress

### What is Mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is being fully aware of what is happening in the present moment without judgement.
- Mindfulness allows you to be fully present in your life and work and can help you notice what your body needs to make good lifestyle choices.

### Benefits of being mindful include:

- Reduced stress
- Better relationships
- Less anxiety and depression
- Improved mood
- Improved memory and focus
- Increased immune function
- Overall improvement to well-being

### Mindfulness meditation exercises:

1. One minute of mindfulness—Sit quietly and focus on your breathing for one minute.
2. Mindful observation—Observe an object, allowing your attention to be fully absorbed by the object.
3. Ten-second counts—Close your eyes and focus your attention on counting to ten. If your mind wanders to thoughts other than counting to ten, start back at number one.

### Stress Management Resources

**Insight Timer** for a massive library of free guided meditation, or **Breath2Relax** and **Tactical Breather** for science-backed breathing exercises to lower heart rate. For cognitive tools, **Mindshift** offers CBT-based strategies for anxiety and stress management at no cost.

## UMass Memorial Wellness Initiative

## Recognition, Acceptance, and Action

There may be times when we have no control over things that cause us stress. However, we do have control over how we cope with the stress.

### When the response

- is a reaction that we have to our environment
- is a response to a situation that we cannot control
- is a reaction in a way that is healthy for you and your loved ones

## Using Mindfulness to Cope with Stress

### What is Mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is being fully aware of what's happening in the present moment with an intention
- Mindfulness allows you to be fully present in your life and work and go beyond your usual ways of thinking about things

### Benefits of being mindful include:

- Reduced stress
- Better relationships
- Less anxiety and depression
- Improved mood
- Improved memory and focus
- Improved immune function
- Overall improvement to well-being

### Mindfulness meditation exercises:

1. Transcendental Meditation—Close your eyes and focus your attention on counting to ten. If your mind wanders to thoughts other than counting to ten, start back at number one.
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### Stress Management Resources

Visit [www.umassmed.edu/wellness](#) for a comprehensive list of free guided meditation, or [Breath2Relax and Tactical Breathing](#) for techniques that help in coping with stress to lower heart rate. For more information, visit [www.umassmed.edu/wellness](#) for stress management resources.

# STRESS AND HEALTH

## Stress Management

Some stress is normal. But too much stress can lead to physical problems, such as high blood pressure and heart disease. People who are unable to find healthy stress management may turn to unhealthy methods of alleviating anxiety, such as overeating, heavy drinking, and smoking, all of which can also cause heart disease.

## Risk Factors for Stress-Related Illnesses

People who suffer from high anxiety are at risk for a number of illnesses. Risk factors, or causes of anxiety, may include the following:

- **Negative outlook:** People who have a negative outlook on life tend to suffer from more stress symptoms than people who have a positive outlook.
- **Poor nutrition:** Unhealthy food choices put physical stress on your body, which can weaken your immune system and lead to illness.
- **Lack of physical activity:** A lack of physical activity can leave you feeling sluggish and stressed. Physical activity increases your circulation and promotes a sense of well-being. It can also help you to get more sleep.
- **Lack of emotional support:** People who do not have enough emotional support have more difficulty dealing with stress than those who have people they can turn to in times of stress.
- **Not enough relaxation:** People who do not take time to relax tend to be more stressed than those who take time out for themselves.

## Managing Stress

Here are some things you can do that will help you manage stress:

- **Think Positive.** When you find yourself in a stressful situation, try to find something positive to focus on instead of dwelling on the negative.
- **Exercise.** Aim for 2 ½ hours of aerobic exercise each week (spread throughout the week in increments of at least 10 minutes). You should also do strength training 2 times a week. Consult with your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** A healthy diet is one that is low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium (salt). Your diet should include lean proteins, fruits and vegetables, and whole grain breads, cereals, pasta, rice and potatoes.
- **Develop a support system.** If you find it difficult to meet new people, try to find ways to socialize. You might start by sitting at a new table in the lunchroom at work or attending functions, such as church gatherings.

- **Relax.** Take time out to do things you enjoy, even if it is only for a few minutes at a time. Go for a short walk, listen to music or read a book. Do whatever activity is relaxing to you.
- **Ask your doctor for help.** Your doctor will have access to a team of health care professionals that can help to develop a stress management program that is right for you.

## Emotional Wellness Checklist

Emotional wellness is the ability to successfully handle life's stresses and adapt to change and difficult times. Here are tips for improving your emotional health.

### REDUCE STRESS

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Stress can give you a rush of energy when it's most needed. But if stress lasts a long time—a condition known as chronic stress—those “high alert” changes become harmful rather than helpful. Learning healthy ways to cope with stress can also boost your resilience.

#### TO HELP MANAGE STRESS:

- Get enough sleep. Adults need 7 or more hours each night, school-aged kids need 9-12, and teens need 8-10.
- Exercise regularly. Just 30 minutes a day of walking can boost mood and reduce stress
- Build a social support network.
- Set priorities. Decide what must be done and what can wait. Say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- Show compassion for yourself. Note what you've accomplished at the end of the day, not what you didn't.
- Schedule regular times for a relaxing activity that uses mindfulness/breathing exercises, like yoga.
- Seek help. Talk to a mental health professional if you feel unable to cope, have suicidal thoughts, or use drugs or alcohol to cope.

### BUILD RESILIENCE

People who are emotionally well have fewer negative emotions and can bounce back from difficulties faster. This quality is called resilience. Learning healthy ways to cope and how to draw from resources in your community can help you build resilience.

- Develop healthy physical habits. Healthy eating, physical activity, and regular sleep can improve your physical and mental health
- Take time for yourself each day. Notice the good moments. Do something you enjoy.
- Practice gratitude. Take time to be thankful each day.

- Look at problems from different angles. Think of challenging situations as growth opportunities. Try to see the positive side. Learn from your mistakes.

#### GET QUALITY SLEEP

To fit in everything we want to do in our day, we often sacrifice sleep. But sleep affects both mental and physical health. It's vital to your well-being. When you're tired, you can't function at your best. Sleep helps you think more clearly, have quicker reflexes and focus better. Take steps to make sure you regularly get a good night's sleep.

- Go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning.
- Relax before bedtime
- Try to get natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes each day.
- Exercise daily (but not right before bedtime)
- Sleep in a quiet, comfortable environment

#### STRENGTHEN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS—BUILD HEALTHY SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Social connections might help protect health and lengthen life. Our links to others can have powerful effects on our health—both emotionally and physically. Whether with romantic partners, family, friends, neighbors, or others, social connections can influence our biology and well-being.

- Surround yourself with positive, healthy people.
- Get active and share good habits with family and friends.
- Volunteer for things you care about in your community, like a community garden or place of worship.
- Take a class to learn something new.
- Join a group focused on a favorite hobby.

How you feel can affect your ability to carry out everyday activities, your relationships, and your overall mental health. **BE YOUR HEALTHIEST SELF.**

# 15 Biblical Ways to Love Yourself Today

God invites us to love him, each other, and ourselves (which is often the hardest part). In the verses below, the phrase "each other" has been replaced with a blank where you can fill in your name.

Love \_\_\_\_\_, John 13:34

Live in harmony with \_\_\_\_\_, Romans 12:16

Stop condemning \_\_\_\_\_, Romans 14:13

Build \_\_\_\_\_ up, Romans 14:19

Accept \_\_\_\_\_, Romans 15:7

Be an encouragement to \_\_\_\_\_, Romans 15:32

Help \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Corinthians 12:7

Be patient with \_\_\_\_\_, making allowance  
for \_\_\_\_\_'s faults, Ephesians 4:2

Be kind to \_\_\_\_\_, tenderhearted, forgiving, Ephesians 4:32

Live peacefully with \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Thessalonians 5:13

Always try to do good to \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Don't speak evil against \_\_\_\_\_, James 4:11

Don't grumble about \_\_\_\_\_, James 5:9

Love \_\_\_\_\_ deeply with all your heart, 1 Peter 1:22

Sympathize with \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Peter 3:8