

taming stress

Do you feel completely overwhelmed by all the demands in your life? Are high levels of stress causing you emotional and physical health problems? Does it seem impossible that you could ever handle all the things that are stressing you?

Don't worry. You *can* learn to manage and release stress with a few wise strategies. Then you can get back to being happy and productive. Try the following suggestions from Mary Bratcher, MA, DipLC, wellness coach and co-owner of The BioMechanics in San Diego.

days. When you notice physical or psychological symptoms of stress, write down what you were thinking or doing at the time. Also record recurring thoughts that keep you awake at night. This strategy will help you identify the cause of your stress.

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Making a Plan

To manage high-stress situations effectively, you must be aware of how stress affects you,

make choices about how to handle it and develop a workable plan of action. Following are components of a good stress management plan:

1. Recognize and acknowledge the fact that you are not immune to stress.
2. Be aware of your physical and emotional reactions to stress (e.g., getting angry, withdrawing, overeating).
3. Counteract your initial reaction with positive strategies (e.g., count to 10, breathe deeply).
4. Make a deliberate choice to do things differently each day (e.g., "I won't yell," "I'll speak up for myself" and "I won't binge eat").
5. Tackle one issue at a time (e.g., curb overeating). Trying to fix everything at once will only create more stress. Also, sometimes it is more beneficial to start working on smaller issues to help you gain the perspective (and strength) to take on the bigger stuff.
6. Set short-term goals, review them often and recognize your achievements.

Your stress management plan should also include some form of relaxation. (For ideas, see "Take It Easy.")

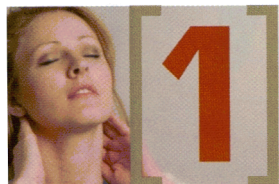
Please realize that developing a stress management plan takes time and practice. You may find it difficult to improve your situation at first and you may experience setbacks. If you do, simply refer back to your plan and adjust your behavior

until the new actions become second nature. The time and energy you put into developing stress awareness and creating your stress management plan will bring many rewards. You'll be healthier, happier and more pleasant to be around. You'll also be able to take better care of clients, friends, family members and, most important, yourself. ■

take it easy

Relaxation is a crucial part of your stress management plan. Try these methods of alleviating stress:

- Determine how you like to relax and then schedule activities you prefer (e.g., go mountain biking, take a bath, play basketball or go for a stroll).
- Take a "time-out"—breathe deeply, turn off your phone, stop moving, start moving, etc.
- Accept offers of assistance from others or ask for help when you need it.
- Eat, drink and be merry—choose healthy food, drink lots of water and get plenty of rest.



1 Recognizing Stress

Do you feel stressed out? Common physical signs of unhealthy stress levels include head-

aches; muscle/joint pains; mouth ulcers; stomach or bowel problems; muscle tics; and skin problems like pimples/acne breakouts, eczema, psoriasis, hives or rashes. Common psychological responses to stress include difficulty sleeping, irritability, tearfulness, anger outbursts, trouble remembering things, panic attacks, increased alcohol/drug consumption, overeating and loss of sex drive.

If you experience any of these symptoms without a legitimate reason (such as a serious illness or the death of a loved one), you probably have high levels of stress. On the brighter side, these "early-warning" signs can help you identify your stress before it becomes debilitating.



2 Identifying Sources of Stress

People often misidentify the source of their stress and end up blaming

or taking it out on the wrong person. One way to uncover the source of your stress is to keep a "stress journal" for a few

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