



How to Cope with Stress

Q. What are some healthy ways to cope with stress?

A. Everyone experiences stress from time to time. It can come from challenges at work, family struggles, health problems, or financial woes. Stressful events in life might make you feel frustrated, worried, angry, or depressed. And over time, stress can take a toll on your physical and mental health. That's why it's important to cope with stress in healthy ways. Start by learning to recognize stress in your life. Stress can cause an increased heart rate, rise in blood pressure, tight muscles, emotional upsets, frustration, or anger. Memory problems, moodiness, trouble sleeping, excessive worry, or illness can also be signs of too much stress. Pay attention to how you are feeling. When you learn to recognize stress, you can choose to respond in ways that can help you feel better and stress less.

Try these tried-and-true coping skills:

- **Get adequate sleep daily.** Feeling tired decreases your coping ability, makes you feel more irritable, and less patient.
- **Eat a warm, nourishing meal at least once a day.** Just snacking on cold food is not very satisfying or comforting.
- **Be physically active daily.** When you go for a walk, ride a bike, run, or exercise in some way, your body releases chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins can trigger a positive feeling in your body and help reduce stress. In addition, the exercise uses up the stress hormones, helping you return to a normal relaxed state.
- **Relax. Take a deep breath.** Slowly count to five, before slowly exhaling through pursed lips. Repeat 4-5 times. As you exhale, feel your shoulders relax and drop down. Make sure your stomach expands as you breathe. Belly breathing like a baby is the healthiest way to breathe. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation. Getting a massage or doing creative activities can also help you relax, get your mind off your problems, and cope better with stress.
- **Be social.** Sometimes connecting with others can help cut through the stress you may be feeling. Greet people at the store. Call a friend. Attend community functions. Or take a class. Being around other people in a social setting can be a great way to take your mind off the things that are stressful in your life.
- **Eat healthy foods.** A bowl of warm oatmeal or a slice of whole-grain bread can boost serotonin levels and deliver a calming effect to your brain. And foods like oranges with vitamin C and fish or nuts loaded with omega-3 fatty acids are good for helping the brain work better, especially in stressful times.
- **Use the energy from stress to deal with problems that need fixing.** Don't ignore feelings of stress hoping they will go away. As you deal with the problems, you can find solutions, learn better coping skills, and improve both your mental and physical health.
- **Seek help if needed.** Get help from understanding friends, your boss, your pastor, or a trained mental health counselor as needed to deal with problems you can't seem to cope with on your own.

Sources:
Harvard School of Public Health, International Behavioral Neuroscience Society