

TIPS TO Ease Tension

Work on your attitude. How you react to stress is determined by how you perceive a particular event. Reframe your response by acknowledging that the stress event is outside of you. You are the center and controller of your response.

Think about something else. Distract yourself to break whatever chain of thought is producing the stress.

Think positively. Think about a success or past achievement.

Take a mental vacation. Visualize or gaze at a postcard or poster of somewhere you would like to be and feel safe.

Recite an anti-stress litany. “This too shall pass.” “Tomorrow is another day.”

Use affirmations. “I can handle this.” “Everyone makes mistakes.” “We are all human.” “Staying calm helps me solve problems.”

Count to 10. Use the pause to breathe and relax. It will allow a more relaxed response and lower tension in muscles.

Look away. Focus on something at least 20 feet away to let eye muscles change tension.

Get up and leave. If appropriate, leave the stressful situation for a little while. Go out to lunch. Walk around the block. The exercise and space gives you time to recover from the stress response.

Take several deep breaths. Stress and tension tighten muscles. Breathe by pushing out with stomach muscles to bring oxygen and energy into your body. Exhale and let go of the stress.

Yell or cry. If the environment is private and safe, emotional release can be healing.

Stretch. Stretching muscles reduces the sensation of stress even when we can't do anything about the source of the stress.

Massage your target muscles. Recognize which muscle groups you tense up when feeling stress. Massage those muscles to break the stress-tension cycle.

Press on your temples. Ancient application of acupressure using your fingertips moving in small circles over your temples relaxes muscles elsewhere in your neck.

Drop your jaw and roll it left and right. Notice if you clench your teeth when feeling stress. Yawning and jaw stretches release tension.

Stretch your chest for better breathing. Press your shoulder blades together expanding your chest as you inhale. Relax as you exhale. Repeat 4-5 times.

Relax all over. Use progress relaxation techniques to start with your feet and move progressively to your head (feet, legs, chest, arms, neck, head) relaxing each major muscle group one at a time.

Listen to relaxation tapes (natural sounds) or music. Both can promote relaxation and be inspiring.

Give someone a compliment or thank-you.

Share a joke with someone.

Smile at someone or even yourself.

Take a minute to gaze at the photo of a loved one on your desk, wall or in your wallet.

Comb your hair.

Get a drink of water.

Review an item from your happy file—this is a file where you put birthday cards, thank you notes, letters of appreciation, photos, etc.



TIME Management

The following four steps can help individuals manage their time.

KEEPING A LOG

Analyze how you spend your time. Keep a log of your major daily activities for several days. Note any delays or interruptions. It can be eye opening to see where your time goes.

DELEGATING

Are there tasks you currently do that someone else could handle? Ask your children to help out or find a co-worker who wants a new challenge. Remember, how you ask can be as important as what you ask.

PRIORITIZING

Make two lists:

- Make a list of **activities** that need to be done and how much time you normally spend on each activity—it could be a daily or weekly list. For example:
 - meetings, 1 hour
 - shopping, 45 minutes
 - phone calls, 30 minutes
 - paper work, 3 hours
- Make a second list of **values** that are most important to you along with the amount of time you spend on each. For example:
 - faith/spiritual, 5 hours per week
 - marriage, 5 hours per week
 - children, 4 hours per day
 - entertainment, 2 hours per week
 - physical activity, 20 minutes per day
 - hobbies, 1 hour per week
 - work, 8 hours per day

PLAYING

Be sure to make time for play. Schedule breaks, down-time, or play-time in your day. Taking time for yourself can help relieve stress and refresh you so you can accomplish more.



1. Whitney, E., Hamilton, E. 1984. *Understanding Nutrition*. 183-191.
2. Quick, J.C. and Quick, J.D. 1984. "Preventing Distress Through Better Working Relationships." *Management Review*. 30(4).



Let Go THE STRESS

RELAXATION RESPONSE

The following is a simple, brief activity that can be used to allow the physical changes of a stress reaction to subside and return to a non-stress state.

1. Sit (or lie) in a comfortable position in a quiet environment with eyes closed.
2. Begin with your feet and relax each muscle group moving up to the head—calf, thigh, waist, stomach, arms, chest, neck, face, and forehead.
3. Breathe in through your nose gently pushing your stomach out.
4. Breathe out through your mouth and let your stomach relax.
5. Continue for 10-20 minutes. Open your eyes as need to check time, but do not set a time.
6. When finished, open your eyes but remain seated for a couple of minutes.

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

The following is a physical activity that can be used for releasing muscle tension triggered as a response to stress.

1. Lie flat on a soft surface or floor with your eyes closed and knees bent.
2. Beginning with your right foot, press foot firmly to the floor for five seconds, relax for five seconds; repeat with the left foot.
3. Straighten legs out and press back of lower right leg firmly to the floor for five seconds, relax for five seconds; repeat with left leg.
4. Press each of the following areas firmly to the floor for 5 seconds, relax for five seconds (one at a time):
 - Back of thighs and buttocks
 - Lower back and shoulder blades
 - Arms
 - Back of head
5. Breathe normally as you press and relax.



Release THE TENSION

SIMPLE YOGA STRETCH

The following physical activity can be used for releasing muscle tension triggered as a response to stress.

1. Stand relaxed, arms hanging at sides and feet about one foot apart.
2. Tilt head back and hold for five seconds
3. Roll head forward and hold for five seconds.
4. Curl chest and stomach forward as you bend at the waist; arms dangling for five seconds.
5. Inhale slowly through mouth as you straighten up. Raise arms overhead; drop arms slowly to sides as you exhale slowly through your mouth.

CONTROLLED BREATHING

The following activity can be used for releasing muscle tension triggered as a response to stress.

1. Lie down with your back flat on the floor; place a book or large magazine on your stomach.
2. Bend your knees and close your eyes.
3. Push your stomach up 2–3 inches and hold for five seconds, then exhale. Repeat several times. Each time you exhale, say “I am relaxed.” Avoid lifting your chest.



WHAT CAUSES A

Stress Reaction

AT THE WORKPLACE

Job stress comes in many forms and affects people in different ways. Minor sources of stress may include such things as a broken copier or a malfunctioning computer. While minor stressors at work are annoying, it is the major stressors that often cause job burnout, leading people to become unhappy and less productive in their work. Job stressors can also impact other areas of life, such as health and home life. Major stressors at work fall into seven distinct categories.

1. **Control:** This factor is the most related to job stress. Studies show that workers who believe they have a great deal of responsibility but little control or decision making power in their jobs are at increased risk for cardiovascular disease and other stress-related illnesses.
2. **Increased responsibilities:** Taking on additional responsibilities in your job can be stressful. This can be worse if you have too much work to do and are unable to say no to new tasks or projects.
3. **Competence:** Are you concerned about your ability to perform well? Are you challenged enough, but not too much? Do you feel secure in your job? Job insecurity is a major source of stress for many people.
4. **Clarity:** Feeling uncertain about what your duties are, how they may be changing, or what your department or organization's goals are can lead to stress.
5. **Communication:** Workplace tension often results from poor communication, which in turn increases job stress. An inability to express your concerns, frustrations or other emotions can also lead to increased stress.
6. **Support:** Feeling unsupported by your coworkers can make it harder to resolve other problems at work that are causing you stress.
7. **Significance:** If you don't find your job meaningful or take pride in it, you may find it stressful .

In summary, job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker.



Managing JOB STRESS

SOME OPTIONS FOR LOWERING YOUR STRESS ON THE JOB INCLUDE:

- **Meet with your supervisor at least once per year** (every 3-6 months is preferable) to talk about your performance and your job. If a performance review is already part of your job, treat it as a challenge to clear up issues that may be causing you stress.
- **Manage your time well.** It's important to leave your job at the office, even if your office is a room in your home. If you give up free time to get more work done, you may pay for it with stress-related symptoms. If your employer offers a flexible work schedule, take advantage of it to fit your own work style.
- **Unplug.** Technologies such as cellular phones and the Internet have made it possible to be available to everyone, including clients and coworkers, at all times. Do not allow technology to eliminate the boundaries between your time and your employer's time. Leave your work cell phone behind when having it with you is not absolutely necessary, or decide not to answer it during times you have set aside for your family and you. Avoid checking work email at home.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF

Stress

Stress can affect you physically, behaviorally, and cognitively or emotionally. However, the signs and symptoms of stress vary from person to person. Below are a few common signs and symptoms of stress.

Physical signs and symptoms:

- Headaches
- Chest pain or rapid heartbeat
- Exhaustion or fatigue
- Insomnia or other sleep problems
- Muscle aches, muscle tension, or even back pain
- Clenching or grinding teeth
- Weight gain or loss
- Digestive concerns such as diarrhea, constipation, stomach upset or nausea

Behavioral signs and symptoms:

- Over or under eating
- Use or abuse of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco
- Decreased productivity or neglecting responsibilities
- Isolating oneself or social withdrawal
- Relationship and interpersonal conflicts

Cognitive and emotional signs and symptoms:

- Forgetfulness and memory problems
- Moodiness or mood swings
- Depression, sadness, or sense of loneliness/isolation
- Anger, irritability, anxiety, short temper, or impatience
- Job dissatisfaction or burnout