



Managing Stress, Building Resiliency



We are living in an age where baseline stress levels are very high. In addition to this, you may have been exposed to a traumatic event or critical incident (any incident that causes a person to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function, either during the event or later). Even if the event is over, or if your life has adjusted around it, you may now be experiencing (or may experience later) some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through an abnormal event.

Emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) can appear at different times. Sometimes they appear immediately after a highly stressful or traumatic event; sometimes they appear a few hours or a few days later; and, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear. The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or occasionally longer. With understanding and the support of loved ones, stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally the event is so powerful that professional assistance can be helpful so that the person does not have to manage by himself or herself.



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Stay connected

For many, one of the most important things you can do when stressed is staying connected with others. Try to reduce isolation. Reach out. Share your feelings with trusted people; let others in. People care. Surrounding yourself with supportive family, friends, co-workers, clergy or other spiritual leaders has a positive effect on your well-being and ability to cope with stress.

Increase your physical activity

If you can, increase your physical activity, especially within the first 24-48 hours after a stressful event. Alternating strenuous exercise with periods of relaxation will alleviate some of the physical symptoms of a stress reaction. Being active also boosts your “feel-good” endorphins and helps you feel more optimistic.

Control your diet

Eat well-balanced, healthy meals, even if you don't feel like it. A healthy diet counters the impact of stress by shoring up the immune system and lowering blood pressure.

Consume less addictive substances

Consume less alcohol, caffeine, and other addictive substances when you are under stress.

Prioritize sleep

Get plenty of rest. Keep a journal – write your way through those sleepless hours, letting out whatever you are thinking or feeling.

Slow down your breathing

Breathing influences physiology and thought processes, including moods. Focusing your attention on your breathing will have a tranquilizing effect on your system.





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Focus on what you can control

Make as many daily decisions as possible, no matter how insignificant they seem. The stress response is triggered when you feel out of control and in danger, but it's important to remember that you have a myriad of choices daily that allow you to have control in the moment. See the list of many things on the following page.

Maintain as normal a schedule as possible

Routine will help you get back into your groove.

Love a pet

Pets are powerful conveyors of stress relief, lowering not only blood pressure but also harmful stress hormones like cortisol, which is associated with depression and anxiety, and elevating beneficial ones like oxytocin, which is linked to happiness and relaxation. Even 5 minutes with an animal lowers blood pressure!

Scale back

Cut back on your obligations when possible. Take a close look at your daily, weekly and monthly schedule and find meetings, activities, or chores that you can cut back on or delegate to someone else.

Prepare

Stay ahead of stress by preparing for meetings or trips, scheduling your time better, and setting realistic goals for tasks both big and small. Stress mounts when you run out of time because something comes up that you didn't account for—build in time for traffic jams, for example.

Take up, or devote time to, a hobby

Engaging in something enjoyable brings us into the present moment, soothing and calming our restless minds. Immerse yourself in an activity you love and notice yourself “being” in the moment.



Common Responses to a Stressful Event

Responses to traumatic or stressful events can take many forms, including:

Physical

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Chills
- Chest pain*
- Difficulty breathing*
- Rapid heartbeat*

Cognitive

- Confusion
- Guilt
- Hypervigilance
- Poor concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Blaming someone
- Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings
- Poor problem solving
- Poor abstract thinking
- Disturbed thinking
- Nightmares
- Intrusive images

Emotional

- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Grief
- Denial
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Apprehension
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Intense anger
- Irritability
- Agitation

Behavioral

- Withdrawal
- Emotional outbursts
- Sleep disturbances
- Increased alcohol or other drug use
- Suspiciousness
- Loss or increase in appetite
- Nonspecific bodily complaints
- Intensified startle reflex
- Pacing
- Erratic movements
- Change in sexual functioning
- Speeding while driving

Spiritual

- Anger at God or the Entity in which you believe
- Disconnection
- Beliefs about self, God and humanity shaken or destroyed

* Indicates need for prompt medical attention

What Can You Control Right Now?

1. How many times you smile today.
2. When and how to ask for help.
3. How you respond to your feelings.
4. How often you say "thank you."
5. Whether you listen or wait to talk.
6. How kind you are to yourself.
7. What you expect from other people.
8. The type of food you eat.
9. If you respond to a comment on social media.
10. How much energy you lend to worrying.
11. How many new things you try.
12. How much physical activity you experience.
13. How often you actively think about your past.
14. How many negative articles you read.
15. The attention you give to your loved ones when you see them.
16. How deeply you breathe when you experience stress.
17. Which commitments you keep and cancel
18. How much information you share with people.
19. Whether you smoke or drink or use drugs.
20. Whether or not you judge other people.
21. How many times you say "I love you."
22. How you begin and end your day.



If your current efforts at stress management aren't working, try something new. EAP is here to help you strategize and take action for a higher quality of life. 1-855-EAP-1NOW [1-855-327-1669]

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