



Identifying and Managing Stress

Purpose: To give a fuller picture to what stress actually is—good and bad, healthy and unhealthy; and to show that it's possible to better identify healthy and unhealthy stressors and how to manage stress more effectively and efficiently.

Stress is a state of tension related to your body attempting to cope with its environment. It's the body's way of preparing to confront an obstacle or run into a tough situation. Anxiety is a sense of apprehension, dread, or uneasiness.

We tend to think of anxiety and stress as negative responses, but both are normal and can help you adapt to the situation at hand. The feeling of stress involves the nervous system and specific hormones in the body, and it can enhance the ability to perform under pressure as well as avoid danger. But when stress is excessive or ongoing and interfering with your body's normal functioning—that's when anxiety and stress become a problem. This can lead to wearing out the body's reserves and leaving a person feeling depleted or overwhelmed, weakening the immune system and making it harder to cope with daily life. The first step in dealing with stress is to learn to recognize it, and the next is to find a way to deal with stress.

Common symptoms of stress and/or anxiety:

- butterflies in your stomach (a sense of uneasiness)
- trouble catching your breath
- trembling (or), sweaty hands
- feeling lightheaded
- feeling nervous or jumpy
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling tired or fatigued all the time
- having trouble concentrating
- irritability and moodiness
- chronic headaches

- trouble sleeping (falling asleep or staying asleep)
- feeling sad or depressed

Problems related to anxiety and stress are among the most common reasons for people to see health professionals. Chronic stress lasting a month or more can put you more at risk of medical problems such as frequent headaches, illnesses and ulcers. Avoiding situations that cause anxiety can make it worse.

* * *

Worksheet on Identifying and Managing Stress

Identify a recent situation where you felt stressed or anxious – 10 mins

(Be gentle and try not to judge yourself or your thoughts or feelings)

How did you feel?

What were your thoughts like?

What did you do about it?

What would you or could you do differently in the future?

* * *

Coping with Stress

Review of coping skills: They are a combo of different tools to help you manage the things that life throws your way. Sometimes it's things you can't control. Sometimes it's things you can.

I'll take just a few answers but who can tell me an example of a healthy coping skill? (*Take 3-4 answers*).

Very good. Now, I'd like to introduce you to two physical exercises you can do on your own to help you alleviate stress

One is the easiest meditation in the world. You're simply going to take in as much air as you can through your mouth and make sure to fill your stomach with as much air as it can fit. You're then going to release the air through your nose as long as you can, concentrating as much as you can only on the breath you're exhaling. You can do it with your eyes open, walking around, driving a car, or doing your homework. While you're doing the exercise, it helps you stay in the present and not worry too much about the future or the past. And it may help calm you or help you find a solution you're looking for after you're finished with the exercise.

The next involves muscle relaxation: Start with one group of muscles—it could be your forehead—hold it tight for a few seconds and then release. Then move to the next group of muscles (ex. Your cheeks) and do the same thing. Work your way down the neck, shoulders, chest, arms, hands, abdomen, legs, and feet muscles. You should feel some tension drain out of your body. It can also make you feel heavy and relaxed.