

Lifestyle Stress Reduction

Stress is unavoidable. How we think about it and how we react to it makes the difference in how it impacts our self-care and our health. While some medicine may help to manage stress, there are many things that you can do to help you manage stress and improve overall health. Partnering with your health care team can help you determine a plan of action for stress reduction.

Self-Management Tips

- Connect with others
- Get involved in activities
- Try different healthy ways to relax (music, exercise, dance, meditation or yoga)
- Take time for fun creative activities or hobbies
- Keep a gratitude journal or write about stressful events
- Take care of spiritual needs
- Make time to laugh (comedy, joke books etc)
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- Try deep breathing techniques
- Get a massage

Good Stress/Bad Stress

Not all stress is bad for us; in fact some stress can be helpful for completing important projects, studying for an exam, speaking in public, or accomplishing challenging goals. On the other hand, distress or negative stress is the type of stress that can cause short- or long-term anxiety, decreased performance and lead to poor mental and physical health. Distress can be caused by many factors that differ for everyone. It is important to recognize the things in your life that cause distress, so you can come up with a plan to manage or cope with or view situations differently.

See Stress Differently

Look at events or triggers from a different angle. Consider “Is there another way to look at this situation?” and remember it’s not helpful to focus on what cannot be changed. Try to improve your mood by looking at what is going well in life. Focus on your accomplishments or what you have overcome.

Stress Reduction Goals

Setting goals around stress management is a great way to decrease any negative impact stress may have on your health. It’s often easier to achieve positive goals. An example of a positive stress management goal is, “I will write about what I am thankful for at least 10 minutes three times per week.”

Specific - What are you going to do to manage your stress?

Measurable - How much time, how many sessions?

Attainable - Do you have what it takes to follow through?

Realistic - What can you actually do? (improvement over perfection)

Time-Connected - How frequent? How long will you commit?



Helpful resources:

The American Institute of Stress
www.stress.org

National Institute of Mental Health:
nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress

American Psychological Association:
apa.org/topics/stress

Mentalhealth.gov

Headspace (App Store)



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Lifestyle Social Connections

Social connections and relationships affect our physical, mental and emotional health. Research shows that the single most important predictor of human happiness and long life is having strong social connections. Health-related measures like blood pressure and heart rate improve even with short positive social interactions. Below are some tips that may help you create and keep important connections in your life.

Forming New Social Connections

- Volunteer; helping others improves health, increases happiness and allows you to meet new people
- Connect with a community resource center to find local options
- Find online or community groups of those who share the same interests—meetup.com or Facebook groups are a great place to look
- Join a religious or spiritual group
- Help at a local animal shelter or adopt a pet to connect with other animal lovers
- Go to a local sports event, music performance, lecture or art display
- Help organize community events by joining a steering committee or board
- Attend community celebrations like parades or walks
- Take a course at your local library or community college
- Ask your employer for ways to increase social connections at work

TIP: Look for social opportunities that improve other areas of health such as activity groups or healthy cooking classes.

Strengthen Social Connections

- Take more care to quickly connect with people you see a lot during the week
- When possible, stay positive while connecting with others
- Share new experiences
- Make and spend time with others
- Be there for those who need you
- Be flexible, supportive and excited about what others are doing in their lives

Social Connection Goals

Setting goals is a great way to increase your sense of connection. It's often easier to achieve positive goals. An example of a positive social connection goal is, "I will increase my feeling of social connectedness by joining a group fitness class that meets for an hour, three nights of the week."

Specific - What are you going to do to improve feelings of connectedness?

Measurable - How much time, how many sessions?

Attainable - Do you have what it takes to follow through?

Realistic - What can you actually do? (improvement over perfection)

Time-Connected - How frequent? How long will you commit?



Helpful resources:

[meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

[purposebuiltfamilies.com](https://www.purposebuiltfamilies.com)

Social Media and Depression

While technology can improve social connectedness in some cases, research finds that those who use social media the most are at a higher risk for depression. Be mindful of how you use technology to support social connections in your life.



[lifestylemedicine.org](https://www.lifestylemedicine.org)

Avoidance of Risky Substances

It is well known that tobacco use and drinking too much alcohol increases the risk of many chronic diseases and death. People who are ready can and do quit smoking; there are more former smokers in the world now than there are current smokers. Some treatments work for alcohol abuse. Treatments often take time, different approaches and many attempts. Giving yourself patience as well as getting support from others is an important part of reaching your goals.

Effective Treatment Models

- Counseling
 - Individual, group, telephone
 - Many quick visits
 - Longer more intense visits
- Medications (anti-relapse)
- Counseling plus medication is more effective

Slips and relapses are normal and considered part of the change process. Goal setting, support and persistence is key!

Goals for Avoiding Risky Substances

Setting goals around substance use (tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs) is a great way to start making changes. An example of a goal is, “I will swap my morning cigarette with chewing gum at least 5 days this week for the next four weeks. I will ask my partner to help keep me on track and use the free texting service for more support.”

Specific - What are you going to do to decrease your substance use?

Measurable - How much will you reduce it by?

Attainable - Do you have what it takes to follow through?

Realistic - What can you actually do? (improvement over perfection)

Time-Connected - How frequent? How long will you commit?

Helpful Resources:

National Quit Link: 1-800-Quit-Now
SmokeFree.gov <https://smokefree.gov/>
nami.org
NIAAA Alcohol Treatment Navigator
alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry
www.aaap.org
American Psychological Association
www.apa.org
American Society of Addiction Medicine
www.asam.org
NAADAC Substance Abuse Professionals
www.naadac.org
National Association of Social Workers
www.helpstartshere.org

Substance Abuse Treatment Locator
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
www.aa.org
Moderation Management
www.moderation.org
Secular Organizations for Sobriety
www.sossobriety.org
SMART Recovery
www.smartrecovery.org
Women for Sobriety
www.womenforsobriety.org
Al-Anon Family Groups
www.al-anon.alateen.org
Adult Children of Alcoholics
www.adultchildren.org
www.psychologytoday.com/us



Guidelines:

Standard alcoholic drink in US:
12 oz beer
5 oz table wine
1.5 oz of 80-proof spirits

Typical Containers
750 mL wine = 5 drinks
750 mL spirits = 18 drinks
1 L spirits = 24 drinks

Low Risk Drinking Guides by National Institutes of Health

Men
No more than 4 drinks on any day
No more than 14 drinks in 7 days

Women
No more than 3 drinks in any day
No more than 7 drinks in 7 days

“Binge” Drinking is defined as:
5 drinks in 2 hours for men,
4 drinks in 2 hours for women.



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