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What Is Stress Management?

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What is Stress Management?

Ever notice that a good laugh has a way of lightening your burdens? Or maybe you've experienced a scenario like one of these. Your day feels completely stressful and overwhelming, but then you coach yourself to step away from the frenzy, collect your thoughts, make a list of what's going on—prioritizing what's important. Has your list ever helped you discover that perhaps your day is more manageable than it seemed?



Or maybe you usually go walking with a friend before you start your work day. This week seems entirely too busy and stressful to fit in such "frivolities." But you decide that instead of skipping it, you'll go ahead and walk. Afterwards, you notice it was good for you physically, socially, and emotionally and upon sitting down for the work day, you actually feel more able to attack the list of tasks.

Learn to "Pump the Brakes" on Stress

Laughter, physical activity and organizing your thoughts can be effective stress-management techniques. But something as simple as a short break can also be effective. Dr. Robert Sapolsky, stress expert and neurology professor at Stanford, says we all need to commit to regular stress management and learn how to "pump the brakes" on stress without loading it onto other people. Let's talk about why and how.

The Purpose of Stress

Emotions are signals to help us recognize problems. Stress hormones help us fight-or-fee when we are in danger. But our body's stress response can become a problem when it constantly signals danger about issues that aren't necessarily a threat, or it grows to the point of overwhelming our health, well-being or clear thinking.

Why Practice Stress Management?

Your mind deserves better than to be loaded down with the never-ending job of worrying! Some stress can be beneficial and may lead to actual problem-solving, but a lot of our stress is unnecessary and even harmful. Research is clear that stressed brains do not operate the same way as non-stressed brains. John Medina, Ph.D., director of the Brain Center for Applied Learning Research at Seattle Pacific University, says creativity, productivity, motivation and sometimes even your immune system will all suffer chronic stress.

How Do We Learn to Manage Our Stress?

Step 1: Awareness! Learn about your "Low Zone." Stress has a way of becoming chronic as the worries of everyday living weigh us down. Or perhaps you've become accustomed to stress in your life, and you allow whatever is currently the most stressful problem to dictate what you will do each day. Everyone needs pleasure, productivity and creativity in their lives and chronic stress robs us of these.

Take a look at this continuum :



- 1 — I'm creatively and cheerfully engaged in life.
- 2 — I'm relaxed and expect to stay this way.
- 3-5 — I can handle stresses and think of positive solutions to my challenges.

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- 6-7 — I'm moderately irritable, anxious or overwhelmed, and stresses feel burdensome .
- 8 — My problems seem unsolvable. Many things are irritating or upsetting me.
- 9 — Help! I'm about to lose it!
- 10 — I have chart-topping negative emotions

Where do you put yourself now? How do you know when you've passed the moderate point? Identify for yourself the small changes you can detect in your mood as you move up the continuum. This may take a few days of observing yourself, but if you are like most people, (and chances are good that you are!) your stress level will climb in a predictable pattern. If you take time to learn your emotional cues, you can learn to regulate your stress so that you spend more of your time in the "low zone" (at numbers 1-5).

But you don't know how stressful my life is!

Clearly some people have more stressful environments than others, and those people will likely pay a toll for it unless they learn to manage stress and improve their quality of life. For example, the [stress of becoming a caregiver](#) often results in health difficulties and emotional health challenges. If you are a caregiver, it's especially important that you learn stress-management skills so that you can keep yourself in the "low zone," find ways to enjoy your life and allow your caregiving to have moments of satisfaction and joy.

Step 2: Learn to Live in the Low Zone. Once you've passed the mid-zone mark into the high-stress zone, it's time to take a stress-management moment. Maybe that means that you call a friend, take a short 5 minute walk outdoors, remind yourself of what you can and cannot change or keep a funny book on hand that you can visit when you need a laugh. Whatever works best for you, take the time to bring your stress level back closer to the "low zone." Notice what happens to your body and mind when you take these breaks.

The Benefits of Low-Zone Living

The benefits of low zone living are plentiful! You'll feel more creative, more alive, and more able to enjoy small moments of happiness. Furthermore, you reserve your "high zone stress responses" for times when it's more appropriate. When life and death are not on the line, we do not need chart-topping emotional responses. So let's learn to enjoy the gifts of life and put aside the stresses whenever we can.

Learn More:

- [Blood Pressure and Stress](#)
- [FAQs About Stress](#)

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