

# Information

Put simply, stress is the physical and/or emotional reaction you have to a change or outside influence. When you are under stress your immune system is suppressed and you become more susceptible to illness and infection. Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health and your emotions do impact on your entire well being. Recent studies have shown that successful self-management of stress in an emotionally healthy way decreases the progression of disease.

On the other hand poorly managed stress can progress to anxiety and depression. When this happens you do not eat regularly, do not sleep well, and find it hard to take care of yourself. Self-management techniques for emotional management are vital to maintain your overall health and well being.

The following will help you with your self-management:

## Be aware of how you react (physically and mentally) to stress

If stress makes you:

- decrease the amount of exercise you do
- increase eating (comfort eating) especially bingeing on unhealthy foods
- increase smoking - or start smoking
- increase alcohol consumption
- increase drug consumption (both prescription and recreational)
- irritable and/or angry towards friends and relatives

then you may need to consider techniques to manage your stress. A stress diary is a good way to see patterns, reactions, and causes of stress in your life which will enable you to prepare management strategies to deal with them.

## Be aware of the sources of stress in your life

These may include:

- personal issues - such as sickness, loss and grief, relationships and money issues
- environmental issues - such as where you live, the conditions in which you live, noise, physical safety, overcrowding, and even the weather
- work issues - such as too much, too little, lack of, excess challenges or interest, conflicts with others, poor time management, and lack of prioritisation or procrastination.

Find a technique/method or activity of stress reduction which works for you and that you enjoy!

## Techniques

### Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple, but very effective method of relaxation. The way you breathe affects the tension in your muscles, and influences your thoughts and feelings. For the most effective deep breathing, breathe in through the nose and fill your lungs, then breathe out through your mouth and empty your lungs.

### Progressive Muscular Relaxation

This technique is useful for relaxing your body particularly when your muscles are tense. Work through muscle groups in your body - starting with feet, moving up to legs, bottom, stomach, shoulders, arms, hands, and face. Squeeze each muscle group as hard as you can, hold for a count of three seconds, and then relax that part of the body. Then consciously relax the muscles even further so that the muscles are as relaxed as possible.

### Imagery in Relaxation

The use of imagery in relaxation is achieved by imagining a scene, place or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image with for example, sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, etc. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.

## Imagery in Relaxation (contd)

Scenes can involve complex images such as lying on a beach in a deserted cove. You may 'see' cliffs, sea and sand around you, 'hear' the waves crashing against rocks, 'smell' the salt in the air, and 'feel' the warmth of the sun with a gentle breeze on your body. Other images might include looking at a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever you chose. You will be able to come up with the most effective images for yourself.

## Making it real - ideas to try:

- Be with your friends, do things with them and talk to them
  - Talk to other people with similar health conditions, as you may find that others have felt the same way
  - Consider a support group and help others
  - Take a step back and put things into perspective
  - Think positively - don't worry, be happy!
  - Laugh!
  - Make a worry list. This helps to get it out of your head and into perspective
  - Take a daydream holiday and allow yourself to escape from your worries
- Do things that make you happy like having a bath, reading a book, or listening to music
  - Take long slow deep breaths. Close your eyes while you do this
  - Do activities daily. Get up, bathe, get dressed, go out
  - Balance work, rest and play
  - Break down big tasks into easy jobs - don't procrastinate!
  - Go for a walk, as fresh air and exercise are good for the body, mind and soul
  - Record your thoughts and feelings in a journal
  - Listen to your internal talk - keep that voice positive!
  - Stop or cut down on alcohol and drugs. They can cause depression and get in the way of addressing your emotions
  - Eat a balanced diet
  - Learn about your condition and what local resources are available to assist you. This helps you realise you are not alone and that you can do something about it
  - Whilst talking to your doctor or other health professional is advisable, remember to consider approaching a counsellor who may be able to offer new perspectives and develop alternative strategies to address your feelings and concerns

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*The information provided assists in self-management and is intended as recommendations only. For more information please see your medical or health professional.*



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