

Stress has several negative effects on the body. It elevates blood pressure and the rate of breathing and it decreases the function of the immune system. Learning to manage stress using some of the following tips will help you feel better, both physically and mentally.

1. Taking charge

Understand your sources of stress and change the ones you can. Review your beliefs and whether they help you to adapt or react.

2. Look after yourself

Get some exercise everyday. Get enough sleep and make sure you eat a healthy diet.

3. Learn progressive relaxation techniques

Recognize the stressful situations that make your body over-react. You can learn to control your body response to stress and feel less exhausted and fearful. See the relaxation technique hand-out for details.

4. Change your perspective - practice acceptance and flexibility

- a) Instead of worrying about “what will happen if...”, try saying to yourself, “so what if...”. Will whatever is happening matter next week? Tomorrow? If it will make a big difference, then it deserves your coolest, calmest approach.
- b) Watch out for perfectionism - set realistic goals. If someone else does the job differently than you would have - is your way really the only way.? Take a shortcut once in a while not everything has to be “A-1” all the time. Use your energy for activities you enjoy.

5. Find humour in it

Try to find some humour in a situation. If everything is perfect, life would be quite boring. So laugh at yourself. Loosen up and enjoy life.

6. Establish a serene place and time of your own

Take time each day to be quiet. Find a restful spot either indoors or outside enjoying nature. Unwind by taking a stroll, watching a sunset or listening to music. Give yourself a chance to “catch your breath” and “gather your thoughts together”. Use mental imagery to create a peaceful retreat and let yourself relax. Mental relaxation creates physical relaxation in your body.

7. Have realistic expectations

Develop a realistic schedule of activities, including time for yourself, recreation and relaxation. We all need to adjust our expectations of ourselves from time to time. This is particularly true as we age and if illness limits our activity. Reduce time urgency. Decide which activities you enjoy and which you must do, then weed out anything that doesn't fit into one of these two areas. Look at your “must do” list and see what you may be able to delegate to someone else. Slow down. Pace, don't race. Allow plenty of time to get things done. Take mini breaks.

8. Connect with other people

Seek outside help to help deal with anger or problems rather than allowing them to build. Friends can be a good medicine. Conversation, regular social engagements, and sharing thoughts can reduce stress.

