

Mr. Berment
US Health – Unit 2
Emotional and Mental Health
How do we cope with stress?



Coping With Stress

- If stress is the largest influence of our mental and emotional health, how are we to cope or manage stress?
- How can we make it not stressful?
- How do we improve our mental state?
- How do we act more emotionally responsible?
- What Can we do?

Coping With Stress

- A few things to note:
 - We all respond to stress differently so, there's no "one size fits all" solution to managing stress. But if you feel like the stress in your life is out of control, it's time to take action.

Coping With Stress

- Identify the sources of stress in your life
- Learn healthier ways to cope with stress
- Get moving
- Connect to others
- Practice the 4 A's
- Make time for fun and relaxation
- Maintain balance with a healthy lifestyle

Identify the sources of stress in your life

- It's easy to identify sources of stress following a major life event such as changing jobs, moving home, or losing a loved one, but pinpointing the sources of everyday stress can be more complicated.
- It's all too easy to overlook your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that contribute to your stress levels. Sure, you may know that you're constantly worried about school deadlines, but maybe it's your procrastination, rather than the actual teacher's demands, that is causing the stress.

Identify the sources of stress in your life

- To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:
 - Do you explain away stress as temporary (“I just have a million things going on right now”) even though you can’t remember the last time you took a breather?
 - Relax, prioritize your obligations, manage your time better
 - Do you define stress as an integral part of your work or home life (“Things are always crazy around here”) or as a part of your personality (“I have a lot of nervous energy, that’s all”)?
 - Remove yourself from negative environments. Do it the right way.
 - Embrace your environment. Make it better

Con't

- Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional?
 - Stop laying blame on others. Take responsibility.
 - Be a positive influence to others
- Do you lie about where the stress is coming from?
 - Be Honest about you. About your stress levels. If you need help, say so. Positive help is always around. Learn to find it.
 - Once identified, get a handle on it. Immediately.

Con't

- Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining it, your stress level will remain outside your control.

Start a stress journal

- A stress journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. As you keep a daily log, you will begin to see patterns and common themes. Write down:
 - What caused your stress (make a guess if you're unsure)
 - How you felt, both physically and emotionally
 - How you acted in response
 - What you did to make yourself feel better

Learn healthier ways to cope with stress

- Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life. Your **stress journal** can help you identify them.
- Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem. (distancing yourself as opposed to talking to someone etc.)

Get moving

- Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress, but you don't have to be an athlete or spend hours in a gym to experience the benefits. Just about any form of physical activity can help relieve stress and burn away anger, tension, and frustration. Exercise releases endorphins that boost your mood and make you feel good, and it can also serve as a valuable distraction to your daily worries.

Con't

- Put on some music and dance around
- Take your dog for a walk
- Walk or cycle to the grocery store
- Use the stairs at home or work rather than an elevator
- Park your car in the farthest spot in the lot and walk the rest of the way
- Pair up with an exercise partner and encourage each other as you workout
- Play ping-pong or an activity-based video game with your kids

Con't

- Once you're in the habit of being physically active, try to incorporate regular exercise into your daily schedule. Activities that are continuous and rhythmic—and require moving both your arms and your legs—are especially effective at relieving stress. Walking, running, swimming, dancing, cycling, tai chi, and aerobic classes are good choices.

Connect to others

- Social engagement is the quickest, most efficient way to rein in stress and avoid overreacting to internal or external events that you perceive as threatening.
- Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- There is nothing more calming to your nervous system than communicating with another human being who makes you feel safe and understood. This experience of safety—as perceived by your nervous system—results from nonverbal cues that you hear, see and feel.

Connect to others Con't

- The inner ear, face, heart, and stomach are wired together in the brain, so socially interacting with another person face-to-face—making eye contact, listening in an attentive way, talking—can quickly calm you down and put the brakes on defensive stress responses like “fight-or-flight.”
- It can also release hormones (what system?) that reduce stress, even if you're unable to alter the stressful situation itself. Of course, it's not always realistic to have a pal close by to lean on when you feel overwhelmed by stress, but by building and maintaining a network of close friends you can improve your resiliency to life's stressors. On the flip side, the more lonely and isolated you are, the greater your vulnerability to stress.

Connect to others Con't

Reach out and build relationships

- Reach out to a colleague at work
- Help someone else by volunteering
- Have lunch or coffee with a friend
- Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly
- Accompany someone to the movies or a concert
- Call or email an old friend
- Go for a walk with a workout buddy
- Schedule a weekly dinner date
- Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club
- Confide in a clergy member, teacher, or sports coach

- Phone Call...

Practice the 4 A's of Stress

- While stress is an automatic response from your nervous system, some stressors arise at predictable times—your commute to work, a meeting with your boss, or family gatherings, for example. When handling such predictable stressors, you can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose in any given scenario, it's helpful to think of the four A's: **avoid, alter, adapt, or accept**.

Avoid unnecessary stress

It's not healthy to avoid a stressful situation that needs to be addressed, but you may be surprised by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress. Distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts” and, when possible, say “no” to taking on too much.
- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life, limit the amount of time you spend with that person, or end the relationship.
- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn off the TV. If traffic makes you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.

Alter the situation

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.** If something or someone is bothering you, be more assertive and communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the stress will increase.
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- **Manage your time better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you'll find it easier to stay calm and focused.
- **Be more assertive.** Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.

Adapt to the stressor

How you think can have a profound effect on your stress levels. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. Regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude to stressful situations.

- **Reframe problems.** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- **Look at the big picture.** Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with “good enough.”

Accept the things you can't change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control —particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Look for the upside.** When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.
- **Practice gratitude.** When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Make time for fun and relaxation

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by carving out “me” time. Don’t get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you’ll be in a better place to handle life’s stressors.

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don’t allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

Maintain balance with a healthy lifestyle

- In addition to regular exercise, there are other healthy lifestyle choices that can increase your resistance to stress.
- **Eat a healthy diet**. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar**. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs**. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep**. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.