

# How to Better Manage Your Stress!

## What is Stress?

The stress response or **fight or flight response**, can be activated in immediate or ongoing events.

**Stress is the body's physical response to a perceived threat.**

## 2 Types of Stress

**EUSTRESS** Stress that helps a person perform at a higher level and achieve their goals.

**DISTRESS** Stress that is overwhelming and hinders performance and overall well-being.

## Stress Management: Identify Sources of Stress

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. Your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook your own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To identify true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses.



Stress is a risk factor for **heart disease** and **stroke**.

## Common Stress Symptoms

Three common ways people respond to stress:

1. **Angry or agitated.** You may feel heated, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.
2. **Withdrawn or depressed.** You may shut down, space out, or show very little energy or emotion.
3. **Tense and frozen.** You may freeze under pressure, look paralyzed, but under the surface feel extremely agitated.

## Unhealthy Stress Management

Smoking	Using pills or drugs to relax
Excessive drinking	Excessing sleeping
Overeating or under eating	Procrastinating
Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer	Busying yourself to avoid facing problems
Withdrawing from friends, family, activities.	Taking your stress out on others

## Healthy Stress Management: The Four A's

Change the <i>situation</i> :	Change your <i>reaction</i> :
<b>Avoid</b> the stressor	<b>Adapt</b> to the stressor
<b>Alter</b> the stressor	<b>Accept</b> the stressor



### #1. Avoid Unnecessary Stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- Learn how to say "no."
- Avoid people who stress you out.
- Take control of your environment.
- Avoid heated conversations.
- Narrow down your to-do list.



### #2. Alter the Situation

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

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Be more assertive.
- Manage your time better.



### #3. Adapt to the Stressor

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- Reframe problems.
- Look at the big picture.
- Adjust your standards.
- Focus on the positive.



### #4. Accept the Things You Cannot 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.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable..
- Look for the upside.
- Share your feelings.
- Learn to forgive.

### Physical/Behavioural Coping Skills

- **Physical Activity:** Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults accumulate at least **150 minutes of moderate – vigorous** intensity aerobic physical activity **per week**, in bouts of ten minutes or more.
- **Yoga and Stretching:** 5-10 min/day can promote relaxation and increase flexibility.
- **Healthy Diet:** Canada's Food Guide recommends a diet rich in vegetables, fruit, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and meat alternatives.



- **Good Rest:** Can't sleep? Then get up. Clock watching, tossing and turning will only make you tense, and that means stress. Read a book or watch television, which will help with relaxation. Reducing your anxiety about not sleeping will ultimately make it easier to sleep.
- **Exhalation Breathing:** Slow your breathing to help calm you down. Do this exercise for **10 minutes** or more. Repeat this motion several times. Then slowly inhale and exhale without moving your arms.

### Personal/Social Coping Skills

- Spend quality leisure time with family and friends.
- Develop your hobbies and personal interests.
- Enjoy nature and outings.
- Give to others. Volunteering can be rewarding and satisfying. Helping others helps divert attention from yourself and can reduce your anxiety.
- Take a vacation or break from your normal routine. A vacation is only refreshing when it doesn't add stress. Plan ahead and don't try to pack too much into the time available.

### Cognitive/Mental Coping Skills

- **Problem Solving:** When faced with a stressful circumstance, many of us become overwhelmed and panic. Remember, every problem has at least one good solution.
- **Reappraisal:** Sometimes your interpretation of a stressor can magnify its impact, making it feel more stressful than it really is.
- **Meditation:** Meditation can help to settle your mind, make you live in the moment and observe your thought processes. Meditation requires patience and stamina. Start by meditating for **10 to 15 minutes once or twice a day**. Increase this to 20 minutes no more than twice a day. Avoid meditating just before going to bed or you might be too energized to sleep.



#### **Stress Tip: Walk Away from Stress.**

Skip the coffee on your break. Walk off your stress instead. **Physical activity relieves stress and walking energizes your body and spirit.**

Walk alone or join or form a walking club with co-workers or friends.

Resources: <http://www-health.concordia.ca>, <http://www.helpguide.org>, <http://www.heartandstroke.com>, <http://kidshealth.org>