

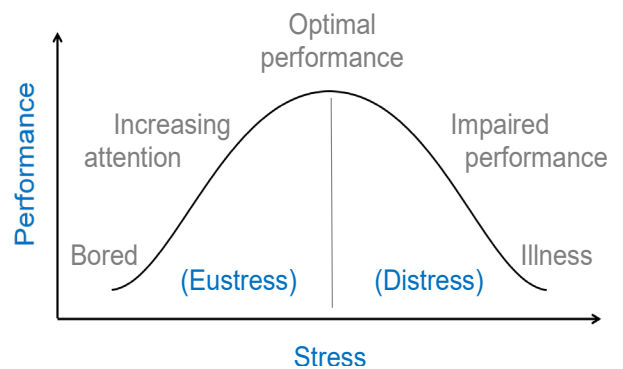
Manage Your Stress

Have you ever found yourself overwhelmed by a situation or the demands of your workload? Do you experience an uncomfortable feeling in your stomach, a tension in your body, and struggle to concentrate on important tasks like exams or major assignments? Are you having trouble falling asleep, due to racing thoughts or worries late at night? Perhaps you or those around you have noticed increased irritability, disengagement, or reactivity.

If so, you might be experiencing the negative effects of excessive or prolonged stress. Knowing what stress is can help you to start taking control and managing it for yourself.

Aspects of Stress

Stress is the body's natural response to challenging situations, triggering both physical and mental reactions. Its impact can vary, ranging from positive outcomes like increased alertness and motivation (known as **eustress**) to negative effects when stress levels are high or prolonged (known as **distress**). Distress can lead to worry, tension, and a decrease in overall wellbeing, affecting our ability to relax, concentrate, and manage emotions. It often causes physical symptoms such as headaches, body pains, digestive issues, appetite irregularities, fatigue, and disrupted sleep patterns. Prolonged distress can even weaken the immune system, making us more susceptible to illness.



Strategies for Personal Stress Management

During times of increasing distress, it's common to feel trapped by intrusive thoughts and emotions, leading to distraction and detachment from present experiences and our personal values. While negative stress cannot be entirely avoided, strategies to manage it effectively and to replace distress with resilience are good options. The following are a few ways to help yourself.

Basic Breathing to Calm and Help Focus

Slowing down and practicing deep breathing exercises can create a sense of calm.

Taking Care of Yourself

When you are in the middle of stress, self-care often takes a backseat. Yet, maintaining physical health through proper nutrition, regular sleep, and exercise is crucial for preserving cognitive function, problem-solving abilities, and resilience. Nourishing meals and consistent sleep patterns support energy levels, mental acuity, and immune function, while exercise releases endorphins to counteract stress. Even a brief walk can provide relief during overwhelming moments.

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Grounding Yourself

Grounding techniques help us refocus by connecting with our surroundings and senses. To anchor ourselves in the present moment, actively involve our senses by noticing several things we can hear, smell, touch, see, and taste. Approach each sensation with a sense of curiosity, as if experiencing them for the very first time.

Reengage with Meaningful Activities

Reengagement, or "unhooking," requires purposeful effort to refocus attention on meaningful activities or interactions despite the distractions caused by negative emotions. This entails acknowledging the emotions and associated physical sensations, then deliberately recommitting to valued actions, such as kindness and patience, while fully engaging with the present moment.

Seek Support

Connecting with others and nurturing meaningful relationships forms a vital support network that can significantly alleviate the impact of stress. Discussing struggles with a counselor can help identify strategies and additional resources to navigate difficulties effectively.

Let Go of Things You Can't Change

While proactive planning can address many challenges, some aspects of life remain beyond our control. Letting go of what we can't change allows us to redirect energy toward actionable goals within our control, fostering a practical and sustainable approach to problem-solving.

Practice Gratitude and Reflection

Cultivating gratitude and engaging in reflective practices can enhance well-being and resilience. At the end of each day, jot down three positive events and reflect on your contributions to them, fostering a mindset of appreciation and self-awareness.

It Takes Time

Though these strategies may not immediately alleviate stress-related feelings, with consistent practice, they promote alignment with personal values and help us refocus our efforts to achieving our goals, while ultimately supporting overall well-being.

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