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**Y**ou may think stress is what you feel when you are worried or anxious but, to your body, any type of change causes stress, whether it's a good or a bad change. Stress is your physical and emotional response to changes you experience, resulting in positive or negative feelings. Constant internal adjustments are needed to cope with the variety of demands placed on you—like temperature, noise, physical activity, achievements, financial and social worries, and poor health. Stress is not something that happens to you, rather, it's the set of physical and emotional reactions your body uses to adapt to change and stimulus. This is known as your "stress response."

#### is stress always bad?

Some stress can be beneficial. Mild stress can help you work energetically and thrive under pressure. It helps you grow and change, avoid danger and strive for a goal. Likewise,

exercise—physical stress—can produce a temporary strain on your body but its health benefits are indisputable.

Good stress is usually short term and helps challenge and motivate you, improving your performance and well-being, and adding excitement to your life. Some specific examples include getting married, planning for a holiday, a promotion at work, watching a sporting event or playing sport.

When stress becomes overwhelming or is poorly managed, negative effects appear. Prolonged or chronic stress is unpleasant, harmful, builds tension, and leads to burnout and depression. Some specific examples of bad stress include worry about having enough money to pay your bills, a flat tyre on your car, a bad relationship with a work colleague or the illness of your child.

#### why do people cope differently with stress?

We each have different capacities to cope with the situations and events

in our lives. The degree of stress in your life, and your ability to cope with it, will depend on your personality, your nutritional status and energy reserves, your fitness and health, the quality of your sleep, previous experience, your support systems and interpersonal relationships, the number of commitments and responsibilities you have, how much others depend on and expect from you, the number of life changes and traumatic events that have occurred recently, your sense of humour, your level of self-confidence, belief in a higher power or purpose, and how optimistic your attitude is.

#### different types of stress

Stress comes in three forms:  
**Physical stress:** These stressors involve easily-identifiable physical demands and responses on your body, such as exercise, illness, typing all day without a break, eating irregularly or overeating.  
**Emotional stress:** Emotional stressors

are diverse and tend to involve worries, arguments, disagreements and conflicts in your personal life.

**Perceived stress:** This type of stress is imagined or misunderstood. Your imagination and perception are powerful, and can make false situations a reality.

For example, if you don't like dogs, you could become stressed when visiting a friend who owns a dog, even if the dog is good natured. As long as you think an event or situation is real, the same stress reaction will occur as if the issue was genuinely happening.

Recognising the type of stress you are suffering from helps to target stress management and relaxation techniques to deal with the stress in your life.

### five ways to manage stress

It is not possible to completely eliminate stress—and you wouldn't want to.

The key is to find your optimal level of stress that will individually motivate you without making you feel overwhelmed.

By learning to manage and control stress, you can reduce its harmful effects on your physical and mental health.

Just as there are many situations and causes of stress, there are many possibilities for its management. Five key strategies to manage your stress include:

**1. Increase your awareness of stress and how you react to it.** Determine what events and specific situations cause you to feel distressed. Determine how your body responds to stress, if you become nervous or physically upset, and in what specific ways. For example, identify areas in your body where muscle tension builds.

**2. Focus on what's important to you.** Have a look at the direction you are taking in your personal and professional life, and identify what's most important. Re-evaluate your goals, and work toward changes that will improve the situation. Try to spend more time doing the things that will result in rewards you value the most.

**3. Strengthen your physical reserves.** Prepare your body to cope with stress by exercising regularly, following a healthy, well-balanced eating plan, reducing or maintaining a healthy level of body fat, avoiding nicotine, excessive alcohol and caffeine, going on holidays regularly, and getting enough sleep.

**4. Strengthen your emotional reserves:** Develop mutually-supportive friendships and other relationships, pursue realistic goals that are

meaningful to you, expect and plan for some frustrations, failures and sorrows, and be a friend to yourself.

**5. Use relaxation techniques.** Relaxation is a break from your work or activities involving rest or pleasant recreation.

Relaxation allows your body to “let go” voluntarily and helps release tension. Relaxation can help you feel calmer, happier and more energetic, reducing the risk of stress-related illness, and helping you enjoy more restful sleep.

There are many relaxation techniques you can practice to reduce tension, prevent stress from becoming cumulative, and improve your health and wellbeing.

Some techniques are physically relaxing (massage, sauna), some are emotionally relaxing (meditation, deep breathing) and others are a combination of both.

The key is to find a relaxation technique that is suitable for you, and most likely to relieve the type of stress you are suffering.

### take control of stress

To reduce stress, look at ways to gain control over your thoughts, emotions, schedule, surroundings and the way you deal with problems. The ultimate goal is to balance your life and have time for everything that's important to you.

To prepare for and minimise stress, you can either modify a stressful

situation—avoid or alter them—or change your reaction to them. The following are some tips on how you can gain control and prevent stress from occurring.

### avoid stressful situations

**Learn to say no.** Get to know your limits and avoid taking on too much.

Rather than looking for ways to squeeze more into the day, find a way to leave some things out.

**Avoid negative people.** If there are people in your life who cause you stress, limit the amount of time you spend with them.

**Take a break.** If you begin to feel like you're losing control over your stress, take time to clear your mind. Go for a walk, take a day off for a long weekend, or use some leave to take a holiday and clear your mind.

### alter stressful situations

**State your case.** Express your feelings instead of bottling them up when something or someone is bothering you.

**Improve your time management.** Being organised can prevent a crisis, giving you energy and helping you sleep better. Time management helps you focus on getting the important things done and using your time more effectively.

**Control your environment.** Get your surroundings organised and uncluttered, free from noises or images that frustrate you. ↻

## cope with stressful situations

**Focus on the positive** When you are feeling overwhelmed, take a few moments to reflect on the things you have already achieved. Keep things in perspective and look at each challenge as an opportunity.

**Alter your expectations** If you can't change a stressful situation, learn to change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude. Don't expect perfection in others or yourself.

**Look for a compromise** Don't expect others to change without changing a little yourself. Make a concentrated effort to find middle ground and those around you will be more willing to do the same.

