

Managing Your Stress

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Ways to Relieve Stress:

1. Deep Breathing

When you're under stress, muscles tense and breathing becomes shallow and rapid. When you breathe slowly and deeply, it sends a message to your brain to calm down. The brain then sends this message to your body. Deep breathing increases the oxygen available to your body and produces a relaxed feeling. Practice this technique a few times each day, and deep breathing will become a tool you can use to help you relax whenever you feel stressed.

Here's how to do it:

- Sit in a comfortable position and take a few breaths. Notice how your belly pushes out as your lungs fill with air, and how it naturally goes back in as the air leaves your lungs.
- Then take some deep breaths. Breathe in for a count of 6. Pause for a count of 3. Then breathe out for another count of 6.
- Do this 20–30 times, or for about 5-10 minutes.

2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This is a good technique to use any time you're tense. Progressive means something that happens a little bit at a time. In this technique, you tense different muscle groups one at a time and then let them relax. The tension helps the muscles relax more deeply when you let go.

Here's how to do it:

- Start with your toes. Curl them under as far as you can. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax.
- Then move to your ankles. Bend your feet toward your body as far as you can. Hold for 5 seconds then relax.
- Continue to move up your body, tensing different muscle groups, holding for 5 seconds and then relaxing. Do this with your thighs, hips, abdomen, back, shoulders, elbows, hands, neck and face. Notice how your body feels as you tighten and relax the different muscles.
- End by tightening all the muscles in your body for 10 seconds and then relaxing. All your muscles should now be more relaxed.

3. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is an active type of therapy in which you set the goals that you'd like to work on, and the therapist acts like a coach to help you reach your goals. The therapist will help you determine which strategies will be most effective for you, and help you come up with a plan to implement them. Some of the tools you may learn in CBT are:

- Thought challenging
- Worry management
- Activity scheduling / Time management
- Communication and/or assertiveness skills training
- Exposure to feared situations (gradually face fears such as public speaking, test taking, meeting new people, etc. by learning how to approach them in different ways)

Daily Activities to Prevent or Reduce Stress:

1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a training for your brain that helps you learn to be in the present moment, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Research has proven that if practiced regularly, you will start to respond to stress in a calmer more focused way, rather than feeling out of control. Guided meditation is the best way to learn mindfulness.

Here's how to do it:

- Listen to a guided meditation and follow the directions as best you can.
- Every time your mind wanders off of the meditation, notice that your mind has wandered and gently bring it back to what the guide is saying. Noticing that your mind has wandered and then bringing it back to the present is mindfulness. The more you practice redirecting your mind to the present and accepting whatever is there, you create new neuropathways in your brain, leading to increased calmness, clarity and joy.
- Listen to a guided meditation every day. Set an alarm on your phone for a time that you think you will most likely do it, like right after school, before or after homework, or before bed.
- Do 3-Minute Breathing Space whenever you feel stress coming on to get grounded back to the present and face the stressful emotions and thoughts with acceptance.
- Apps like Headspace, 10% Happier, and Insight Timer can be very helpful in keeping up a regular practice; but, to learn all of what mindfulness has to offer and have more success in keeping up your practice, attend one of our 8-week classes (www.mindfulstl.com or like our FB page, The Center for Mindfulness & CBT, for updated class information).

2. Physical Activity

Being physically active is a good way to help manage the stress in your life. Here's why:

- Doing some form of aerobic activity that makes your heart rate and breathing increase and works your heart and lungs for about 30 minutes causes your brain to release endorphins. Endorphins are natural chemicals that help people feel good and balance the effects of stress.
- Endorphin levels have been found to stay higher even after physical activity has ended. So a person continues to feel good after working out and moving the body.
- People who are physically active every day cope better with stress and sleep more soundly at night.

3. Time Management

A lot of daily stress can be reduced or even prevented if you learn how to make the best use of your time and be organized. Here are some things you can try:

- Plan ahead. Use a planner or scheduling worksheet to plan out when you are going to do each assignment.
- Make a list of things you need to do. Circle what you need to do first, or put things in order from most to least important.
- Make sure you have all the materials you need before starting a project.
- Don't wait until the last minute to start something.
- Do a little at a time. Break big tasks into smaller steps.
- Work with a friend to help a task go faster or be more fun.
- Focus on what you need to do. Don't let yourself get distracted. For example, you might turn off your phone or the TV.
- Reward yourself for getting tasks done. For example, you can watch your favorite TV show after you write one page of your paper.

4. Talk About It

Talking to someone about what's causing you stress is another helpful technique. Sometimes just describing or sharing your feelings about a stressful situation to a friend or trusted adult can help you feel better. Let the person know if you need him or her to just listen and understand your feelings, or if you'd like help thinking of things you could do to relieve the stress. Talking to others can also help you get more information or come up with ways to help prevent stress in the future. Some ways you could start:

- "I'm really stressed about this situation. Could I tell you about it?"
- "I don't know what to do for this assignment. Could I run some ideas by you?"
- "What do you do when you're feeling stressed? Could you give me some ideas?"
- "Could you give me more information about...?"

5. Self Care

Taking care of yourself is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to reduce or even prevent stress from occurring. Here are a few of the ways you can provide yourself with care:

- Get enough sleep (8-10 hours per night)
- Eat healthy food every 3-4 hours
- Do enjoyable activities
- Spend time with friends or family
- Smile and laugh often

My Stress Management Plan:

Three stressors in my life that I'd like to work on are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Three things that I'm going to try in order to reduce my stress are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I am going to remember to do these things by:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.