

Healthy Ways to Cope With Stress

Feeling stressed? In the past, you may have reached for food for comfort, which feels good at the time but can often be followed by feelings of guilt and shame. Use this list to help develop alternative coping mechanisms.

- ✓ Address negative and unhelpful (stressful) thoughts:
 - Identify the “negative thinking trap.” (see previous handout: Addressing Negative and Unhelpful Thoughts)
 - Consider if there is a more positive, realistic, or helpful perspective.
 - Consider what advice/feedback you would give to a friend.
- ✓ Count to 20 in your head. This can give your brain a needed break.
- ✓ Soothe yourself. Get a massage, take a hot bath, have a cup of herbal tea, or put on some calming music.
- ✓ Stretch. Do yoga or other stretching exercises.
- ✓ Take a breather. If you can, take a break from whatever is making you feel stressed.
- ✓ Talk about your feelings. Tell a friend or counselor how you feel.
- ✓ Cut back on caffeine. Caffeine can make you feel jumpy and anxious.
- ✓ Get moving. Do something active—even if it’s just a walk around the block. Bonus points if it’s out in nature!
- ✓ Do something fun. Go out dancing, go shopping, call a friend.
- ✓ Do an activity or hobby you enjoy.
- ✓ Think clearly. Try to put the stressful events in your life into perspective.
- ✓ Sometimes laughter is the best medicine. Watch a funny video or talk to someone who makes you laugh.



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Ways to Relax

Relax your muscles.

Scrunch up your face muscles. Hold for 5 seconds. Now release. Feel your face muscles relax. Do the same with your jaw, shoulder, arm, chest, leg, and foot muscles in turn.

Meditate.

Focus on something simple that you find calming. It could be an image, a sound or your breath. Don't worry if other thoughts get in the way. Just go back to your image, sound or breath.

Imagine.

Imagine a scene that makes you feel peaceful. Try to picture yourself there.

Breathe deeply.

Relax your stomach muscles. Place one hand just below your ribs. Take a slow, deep breath through your nose. Feel your hand go up. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. Make sure to breathe out all the way. Feel your hand go down.

It may take time to see results. Try to practice relaxing for at least 10 minutes a day. Listen to calming music if you wish.

At first, it may be easier to relax if you lie down in a dark, quiet room. But in time, you'll be able to relax anytime, anywhere.