

3 ways to manage stress

Stress is your body's way of responding to demanding circumstances. Prolonged stress can harm your health by lowering your immunity, leading to health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, and strokes. Fortunately, a healthy lifestyle can reduce stress and help your body better cope with its effects.

Three practices you can incorporate into your life to reduce stress are **meditation**, **healthy eating** and **exercise**—all simple, inexpensive and readily available ways to relieve stress. To keep your stress to a minimum, try incorporating all three into your life.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white sleeveless top, is sitting in a living room and meditating with her eyes closed and hands resting on her lap. In the background, there is a dark green armchair with a matching cushion, a small table with a vase of greenery, and a window with a wooden frame.

1. Meditation

A few minutes meditating every day can restore your inner peace. Fully relax your body and mind for a short time to release stressful thoughts by focusing on a simple mantra or your own breathing. During meditation, you can help acknowledge your thoughts as just that—thoughts—and move beyond to a calmer state of mind. The benefits of meditation include:

- Gaining a new perspective on stressful situations
- Building skills to manage your stress
- Increasing self-awareness
- Focusing on the present
- Reducing negative emotions

Anyone can practice meditation and it can be done anywhere. Ways to practice meditation include:

- Breathing deeply
- Repeating a mantra such as, "I nourish my mind and body with positive thoughts"
- Walking and meditating
- Engaging in prayer
- Reading and reflecting

There are many types of meditation, such as yoga, tai chi and guided meditation. You can attend group classes or practice on your own. Whatever you choose, don't worry about the "right" way to meditate and don't judge your meditation skills. It's all good.





2. Exercise

Exercise is a great way to relieve stress. When you exercise, you relieve pent-up tension and release brain chemicals like serotonin that make you feel good. Exercise also contributes to a stronger, healthier body and can improve your sleep.

Almost any form of exercise can relieve stress, so try walking, swimming, biking, running, racquetball, golf, weight training, gardening—whatever you enjoy. Yoga and aerobic exercise, in particular, have stress-relieving qualities.

Consider bringing along a friend, family member, or co-worker when you exercise. Knowing you have to be there for them, and that they are counting on you, provides extra motivation.

It's important to make exercise a regular part of your day. If you think you are out of shape, then take it easy at first and consult with your doctor if you have health concerns. Any form of exercise can help you relieve stress so just get started!



3. Eating Healthy

Someone with a healthy and balanced diet is likely to be far less stressed than someone with a poor diet. When it comes to nutrition, reducing stress is all about having a balance of the correct nutrients. When we're under stress, we tend to reach for sweet or salty comfort foods heavy in carbohydrates. Not only can this type of stress-eating lead to weight gain and health problems, it can exacerbate stress.

If you want to be careful about your diet, increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables and limit your intake of nutrient-deficient fats and carbohydrates. You'll feel better about yourself and give your body a chance to cope with, and recover from, stressful situations.

Limit consumption of these foods because they can aggravate stress:

- Tea, coffee, cocoa and energy drinks
- Alcohol
- Butter and cheese
- Sugar
- Fast foods and takeout foods
- Meat and shellfish
- Soda, soft drinks and chocolate drinks

Consume these foods because they are good for reducing stress:

- Water
- Fresh fruits
- Fresh vegetables
- Fish
- Soups
- Yogurt