



AN INTRODUCTION TO STRESS AND RELIEF

**A practical guide to stress and
alternative treatment**

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WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is hard to define, and it can be different for everyone. Generally, it is an uncomfortable feeling of fear or tension. Often, this feeling can be traced to feelings of pressure, or events that cause pressure.

RESPONSE TO CHANGE & DEMAND

Stress is one of the most common complaints by Americans today. Stress can be both an emotional and physical response to everyday demands through our feelings, changing environment and daily demands of life. According to the American Psychological Association, one third of people are living with “extreme” stress. Additionally, Covid-19 has placed an additional burden on those already affected by stress and, according to experts, will have long lasting impacts. However, not all stress is bad. Positive environmental changes and demands such as a new promotion at work, a new home, or new baby can often produce stress. But, when people feel stressed by even positive environmental factors, we can still experience the emotional and physical effects. Knowing when and how to address the symptoms of stress will help us improve our sense of wellbeing. (Mastroianni, 2020)

For more information and resources on stress and Covid-19, please visit:

[American Psychological Association](https://www.apa.org/stress)



WHAT STRESSES US OUT? (TOP 3)

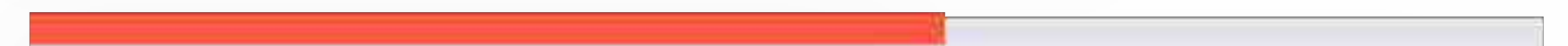
MONEY 72%



WORK 40%



PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 33%

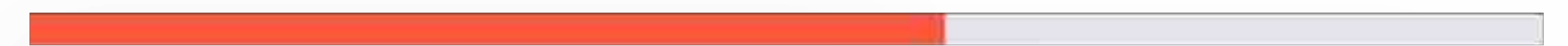


WHO IS MORE STRESSED OUT?

WOMEN 23%



MEN 16%



(Bethune, 2007)

WHAT CAN CAUSE STRESS?

There are four areas where stress development can occur; our environment, our body, our mind and through significant life changes. (Kottler & Chen, 2011)

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental stressors relate to those aspects of your surroundings that are causing you stress. For example, a crying baby or noisy neighbors. Environmental stressors also include your surroundings at work, your relationships with friends or family or social environments that can trigger your stress response.

YOUR THOUGHTS

Our thoughts can provoke powerful feelings and emotion. The power of our own mind responds in how we think, justify or make meaning of the stress. Our thoughts are our brains thinking about the stress in our life. We can refer to this as emotional stress.

YOUR BODY

The body responds to our surroundings through physical manifestations and symptoms. For example, if we are threatened, the body goes into the fight, flight or freeze response. When nervous, our body can respond with sweating. These are considered physiological responses by your body when dealing with change or demand.

LIFE CHANGES

Critical events in our life can cause significant stress; a single incident such as a car accident, assault or death of a loved one. These events frequently have a high degree of stress and are associated with trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although, events such as a new home, baby, job promotion or travel can also trigger a stress response.



To learn more about stress related Trauma and PTSD from Covid-19 in healthcare, please visit
[As COVID-19 cases increase, so does trauma among health providers](#)

WHAT ARE SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF STRESS?



MOOD

- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or depression

BEHAVIOR

- Overeating or undereating
- Angry outbursts
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Tobacco use
- Social withdrawal
- Exercising less often

(Kottler & Chen, 2011)

WHAT ARE SOME PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF STRESS?



MUSCLE TENSION

Muscle tension is marked by the inability to relax the muscles in the body. Often this feels like a spasm that could potentially lead to chronic pain. Stress makes muscles tense, leading to tension related breathing difficulties and intensified aches and pains.

ACHES AND PAINS LEADING TO LOW ENERGY

Stress leads to and intensifies headaches, stomach issues such as heartburn and insomnia. When stressed, we can encounter low sex drive, erectile dysfunction and even missed periods. These symptoms can eventually lead to anxiety, depression and a weakened immune response.

WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEM

Long term stress can weaken your immune system's defenses leaving you more vulnerable to infection and even chronic illness like diabetes, high blood pressure and even heart attack.

(Kottler & Chen, 2011)

GETTING TREATMENT

When emotional and physical symptoms begin to affect your everyday life, professional treatment is recommended. (Krans & Legg, Ph.D., CRNP, 2020)



SEEK OUT A PROFESSIONAL

Talking with a trained professional can help us learn to deal with stress by becoming more aware of our own thoughts and feelings. For example, CBT (Cognitive Behavior Therapy) is common talk therapy used by professionals to help patients identify stress triggers and respond with positive action.



MEDICATION

Stressful events that trigger a stress response are not always the result of mental illness. It's important to note, medications do not treat stress itself, but rather, medication can treat the symptoms of stress. For example, sleeping pills can alleviate insomnia and antidepressants can reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.



ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Alternative and/or complementary therapies typically refer to taking a holistic approach to your physical and mental health. This means considering all aspects of our physical and emotional wellbeing. Some examples of alternative/complementary therapy include acupuncture, yoga, meditation, massage, music, art or play therapies.

To learn more about alternative therapy visit: [8 Alternative Mental Health Therapies](#)

6 TIPS TO REDUCE STRESS NATURALLY

Stress can serve some important purposes by allowing us to quickly respond in times of need, however, prolonged or chronic stress can lead to anxiety, depression and a reduced ability to fight off disease. While we can't always avoid stress, there are simple things we can do every day to help us manage stress and recover more quickly when stressful events occur. (US department of HHS, 2021)



SAY GOODBYE TO ALCOHOL

Artificial stress relievers like alcohol and cigarettes only mask the problem.



EXERCISE DAILY

Walk or join a gym as one of the best ways to naturally reduce stress.



EAT WELL

Consume fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as foods which are high in complex carbohydrates and low in fat.



BREATHE

Inhale deeply and slowly, as you slowly exhale, think of the word "relax".



GOOD SLEEP HABITS

Go to bed and wake up at the same time everyday.



LAUGH

Laughter eases tension, improves mood and the immune system.

TO ALLEVIATE STRESS: *SOAR*

Is a change in attitude all we need to alleviate stress? Dr. Sunil Mishra, Associate Professor at Amity University, Noida (a private research university located in Noida, India) discusses in his journal article, *CHANGE IN ATTITUDE: MANAGING STRESS THROUGH SOAR MODEL*, how to better manage stress through Spiritualism, Optimism, Acceptance and Rationalism (SOAR) model.

SPIRITUALISM (PARIETAL CORTEX)

Believing in a higher power allows us to see the world as larger than ourselves, and in turn, allows us to see our problems are small by comparison. Practices such as prayer and meditation have a soothing effect on the mind and allows us to confront the problem while consciously trying to devise solutions.
(Mishra, 2020)

OPTIMISM (AMYGDALA)

People with higher levels of optimism are less prone to stress. Mishra suggests in his journal that optimism can be developed. The Optimism Attitude Model (OAM) can improve cognitive optimism through a cyclic model of self awareness. Allowing us to develop a more positive outlook and reducing stress .
(Mishra, 2020)

ACCEPTANCE (FRONTAL AND TEMPORAL)

According to Mishra, stress is based, in part, on a fear of losing power. If we come to understand that stress is unavoidable, victory over stress can be seen in acceptance, instead of the fear of power loss. Adapting an empathetic response to others develops a sense of community allowing us to see that we all have struggles and can accept loss as part of life.
(Mishra, 2020)

RATIONALISM (PREFRONTAL CORTEX)

Mishra suggests that emotions can lose their significance when rationalized through a supportive problem-solving system based in therapeutic communication. Recognizing we are in a stressful situation and work to rationalize the true nature of the problem can relieve stress symptoms.
(Mishra, 2020)





MANAGING STRESS: A WAY OF LIFE

Many of us are facing changing and demanding situations every day that can be overwhelming and stressful. In both adults and children, stress can evoke strong emotional and physical responses causing us to respond in unexpected ways. Developing a personal tool-box of strong coping mechanisms combined with a healthy lifestyle will not only help you, but also those around you. Dealing effectively with stress helps to improve mood, our personal relationships and our overall wellbeing. While it is natural to feel stress, taking good care of ourselves every day and being mindful of our stressors can help reduce or eliminate both the physical and emotional effects of stress.

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THANK YOU