

## Managing Stress

This is a stressful time for almost everyone in America. And, while we do need a certain amount of stress in our daily lives to keep us on our toes and help us perform at our peak, when extraordinary circumstances arise, we can find ourselves already tapped out. Many of us operate right on the edge of our stress tolerance levels just to meet all of our daily obligations under normal circumstances. The thought of now having to deal with the additional stress of challenging financial issues, shifting work obligations and changing family responsibilities can push us beyond what we feel capable of handling.

Stress can be an insidious predator. It's easy for us to let stress build without recognizing that is the culprit. We can become short-tempered, fatigued, anxious, angry, or on edge, even when we do not realize the stress in our lives has been growing. These should serve as red flags that we need to slow down, take care of ourselves and do what we can to avoid over-extending ourselves.

Reduce your commitments (by number or intensity). You may have taken on more than you can manage. If you've already committed to do something that has turned into more than you expected, try delegating some of those responsibilities. Then, reconsider whether you want to commit to doing that job again in the future. Remember - it's okay to step back and let someone else do it. They may not do it exactly the way you would have, but that's okay. You may think, "If I don't do it, it won't get done!" If no one cares enough about it to keep it going, then maybe it is time to let it go.

Set personal boundaries. Give up trying to please everyone. You are not responsible for everyone's happiness. You have to take good care of yourself in order to care for those important to you. Choose your priorities and practice saying "No" to obligations that will demand more of you than you are ready to give.

Exercise. Though you may not feel as though you have time for it, regular exercise can increase your mood, energy, confidence and sense of accomplishment. Even doing a small amount can have positive effects. Once started, you can always build on your activity over time. Once you begin, you may be surprised at how you feel and how much exercise you actually do. The key to consistency is finding an exercise that you can enjoy and something that fits any physical limitations you may have.

Take time for yourself. It is easy to feel guilty for taking time to refresh yourself. But, when you can de-stress through a hobby, exercise, friends, or just a long, hot shower, you will be better able to take care of those who depend on you, and you can do it with a more pleasant demeanor.

Spend time with friends – or develop new ones. Having people around you who can lend an ear, a piece of advice, or just encouragement goes a long way toward you feeling a sense of contentment and self-confidence. When you can bounce your thoughts off someone who accepts you, you often experience a degree of relief just from knowing you are not alone and that you may be justified in the way you think or feel.

Improve the atmosphere at home. Make a priority of improving your relationships with each person in your home. Relationships are developed most effectively through one-on-one time. Create a relaxed atmosphere in your home that is a refuge from the rest of the world. If you and your family can relax at home, you will find everything else less stressful, as well.



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