

TIP SHEET: MANAGING STRESS

Stress is an unavoidable part of life. From time to time, everyone experiences increased levels of stress. However, if left unaddressed, stress can continue to build and affect your health and ability to cope with life. This process can occur with chronic stress that builds gradually over time, or with acute stress, that suddenly overwhelms our ability to cope. That's why social support and self-care are important. They can help you see your problems in perspective...and the stressful feelings ease up.

Sometimes stress can be good. For instance, it can help you develop skills needed to manage potentially threatening situations in life. However, stress can be harmful when it is severe enough to make you feel overwhelmed and out of control.

Strong emotions like fear, sadness, or other symptoms of depression are normal, as long as they are temporary and don't interfere with daily activities. If these emotions last too long or cause other problems, it's a different story.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Physical or emotional tension are often signs of stress. They can be reactions to a situation that causes you to feel threatened or anxious. Stress can be positive (such as planning your wedding) or negative (such as dealing with the effects of a natural disaster).

COMMON REACTIONS TO A STRESSFUL EVENT INCLUDE:

- Disbelief and shock
- Tension and irritability
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Difficulty making decisions
- Being numb to one's feelings
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Loss of appetite
- Nightmares and recurring thoughts about the event
- Anger
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Sadness and other symptoms of depression
- Feeling powerless
- Crying
- Sleep problems
- Trouble concentrating
- Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems

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TIPS FOR SELF-CARE

The best ways to manage stress in hard times are through self-care. Below are the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for managing stress in healthy ways:

- Avoid drugs and alcohol. They may seem to be a temporary fix to feel better, but in the long run they can create more problems and add to your stress – instead of take it away.
- Find support. Seek help from a partner, family member, friend, counselor, doctor, or clergy person. Having a sympathetic, listening ear and sharing about your problems and stress really can lighten the burden.
- Connect socially. After a stressful event, it is easy to isolate yourself. Make sure that you are spending time with loved ones. Consider planning fun activities with your partner, children, or friends.
- Take care of yourself.
 - Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet
 - Exercise regularly
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Give yourself a break if you feel stressed out—for example, treat yourself to a therapeutic massage
 - Maintain a normal routine
- Stay active. You can take your mind off your problems by giving such helping a neighbor, volunteering in the community, even taking the dog on a long walk. These can be positive ways to channel your feelings.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

TIP SHEET: RESILIENCE

WHAT IS RESILIENCE

Resilience refers to the ability to successfully adapt to stressors, maintaining psychological well-being in the face of adversity. It's the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or don't have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in everyone.

Resilience is about being adaptable. It's about being flexible. It's about recognizing that you've got strengths that perhaps you never knew you had until you have to use them. Like many things in life—the more you practice, the more you learn. The more you find out about resilience and certainly the more you do of it, then the more resilient you become.

Resilient people are able to adapt to stress, crises, and trauma. They find ways to bounce back from the ups and downs of life and move forward. Some people are born with a strong sense of resilience. Others may need to learn skills and develop resilience. If you would like to become more resilient, these tips and information can help. Remember that resilience is a skill, like riding a bike. The more you practice, the better you'll be.

WAYS TO BECOME MORE RESILIENT

Resilience isn't about "toughing it out" or reacting to every setback with a smile. Resilient people still feel sad, angry, or frustrated when faced with a setback. They just find ways to move forward and to tackle challenges with creativity, hope, and a positive attitude.

Here are some ways to increase your resilience:

- **Maintain a sense of perspective.** Ask yourself, "How big is this problem really?" and "What do I need to do?" Remember not to blow things out of proportion or catastrophize; remind yourself of the good in your life and that things really will change.
- **Recognize that you have a choice in how you handle challenges.** You can't control what happens to you, but you can choose how you respond. You can choose to react to changes and problems with hope and a positive attitude.
- **Accept change.** Change and uncertainty are part of life. When you accept this, you'll be better able to react to change with flexibility.
- **Anticipate challenges** by focusing on the positive ways in which you can meet them rather than possible negative outcomes. This will help you feel more in control and less overwhelmed.
- **Learn how to calm yourself.** When you feel yourself reacting to a challenge with escalating stress and anxiety, take steps to calm yourself (deep breathing, replacing negative thoughts).
- **Overcome your fear.** Everyone feels fear, especially when faced with a change. However, fear can hold you back from new experiences and opportunities for growth. If you are faced with a challenge that feels scary or overwhelming, start with the simplest thing you can do that takes you in the direction you want to go. Ask yourself, "What's the smallest thing I can do to get started?" Once you've thought about it, do it.

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- **Let go of your anger.** A difficult challenge can cause you to feel angry and upset. These feelings are normal, but they won't help you move forward. Work through your anger and try to let go of negative feelings by writing about them or talking with a trusted friend.
- **Take action.** Avoid dwelling on problems. Focus on solutions instead. Figure out what you can do and then do it, one step at a time.
- **Laugh.** Even when things seem to be falling apart around you, try to find time to smile and laugh. It's very healing, and it will help you forget your worries for a few moments. Watch a movie that makes you laugh or spend time with a friend with a good sense of humor.

Source: U.S. Department of State. (n.d.). What is resilience? Retrieved January 12, 2018, from <https://www.state.gov/>

TIP SHEET: SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Trying to tell the difference between expected behaviors and what might be the signs of more serious emotional health concerns isn't always easy. There's no simple test that can let someone know if there is a mental illness or if actions and thoughts might be typical behaviors of a person or the result of a physical illness. Each illness has its own set of symptoms, but some common signs of mental illness in adults and adolescents can include the following:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality ("lack of insight")
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing "aches and pains")
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance (mostly in adolescents)

Mental health conditions can also begin to develop in young children. Because they're still learning how to identify and talk about thoughts and emotions, their most obvious symptoms are behavioral. Symptoms in children may include.

- Changes in school performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance
- fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

If you are someone you know is thinking about suicide, call the national suicide prevention hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255). If you are in immediate medical crisis, please call 911.