

Stress is the body's natural defense against predators and danger. It flushes the body with hormones to prepare systems to evade or confront danger. This is known as the "fight-or-flight" mechanism.

When we are faced with a challenge, part of our response is physical. The body activates resources to protect us by preparing us either to stay and fight or to get away as fast as possible.

The body produces larger quantities of the chemicals cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline. These trigger an increased heart rate, heightened muscle preparedness, sweating, and alertness. All these factors improve the ability to respond to a hazardous or challenging situation.

Factors of the environment that trigger this reaction are called stressors. Examples include noises, aggressive behavior, a speeding car, scary moments in movies, or even going out on a first date. The more stressors we experience, the more stressed we tend to feel.

### **Learning Healthier Ways to Manage Stress, Maintain Motivation and... Be Well**

Developing effective stress management and wellness skills can go a long way toward improving the work environment and can also have a significant positive impact on maintaining staff motivation and morale.

#### **Stress management strategy #1: Avoid unnecessary stress**

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- Learn how to say "no".
- Avoid people who stress you out.
- Take control of your environment.
- Avoid hot-button topics.
- Pare down your to-do list.

#### **Stress management strategy #2: Alter the situation**

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Be more assertive.
- Manage your time better.

### Stress management strategy #3: Adapt to the stressor

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- Reframe problems.
- Look at the big picture.
- Adjust your standards.
- Focus on the positive.



### Stress management strategy #4: Accept the things you can't change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable.
- Look for the upside.
- Share your feelings.
- Learn to forgive.

### Stress management strategy #5: Make time for fun and relaxation

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury.

- Set aside relaxation time.
- Connect with others.
- Do something you enjoy every day.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Reduce caffeine and sugar.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.
- Get enough sleep.





## Lowering Stress and Maintaining Motivation

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### The Four Dimensions of Renewal - Lowering Stress and Maintaining Motivation

Renewing the four dimensions of our nature: physical, mental, spiritual and social/emotional can assist in lowering stress and maintaining motivation.

Renewal Dimension	Activities I Can Do To Reduce Stress and Maintain Motivation
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Physical</u></b></p> <p>Build physical wellness through proper nutrition, exercise, rest and stress management.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Mental</u></b></p> <p>Increase mental capacity through reading, writing, and thinking.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Spiritual</u></b></p> <p>Develop spiritually through reading inspiring literature, meditating and praying, and spending time in nature.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Social/Emotional</u></b></p> <p>Mature socially and emotionally by spending time building valued relationships.</p>	

Each week make a small, achievable commitment or promise to yourself in each category.  
Remember, you want to have small successes you can build on.  
Challenge yourself, but don't make it so hard you will never do it.

Then evaluate your result, (how did you do? did you keep your commitments to yourself?)  
and eliminate obstacles (what are your obstacles? how can they be changed?)

## **In the Moment Stress Busters**

When something sets you off – a critical comment, a social slight, a scheduling snafu – how do you get a grip? The following strategies can not only give you short-term relief, but research shows that practicing them repeatedly trains your brain to resist those “stress storms.” You can basically inoculate yourself against stress.

**Chew gum.** The act of chewing gum (sugar free, please) pumps blood through the part of your brain most affected by stress, “where your joy is,” easing anxiety.

**Chin up.** People who are depressed or stressed-out tend to slump – chest caved in, head down, like the weight of the world is on their shoulders. Reverse that by straightening up: Throw your shoulders back, chest out and chin up. It is extremely difficult for you to be stressed in this posture.

**Beat it.** Listen to rhythmic music, like drumming, to train your brain to stay active and away from stress.

**Eat breakfast.** A morning meal of complex carbohydrates and protein (think 100% whole wheat toast and a scrambled egg) helps prevent blood sugar highs and lows that create a roller coaster of emotions.

**Start Walking!** Aerobic exercise of any kind has the power to calm jangled nerves and improve bad moods. And when it's done every day, it can enhance self-esteem, lower stress and combat depression. Indeed, research has shown that a brisk 20- to 30-minute walk can have the same calming effect as a mild tranquilizer.

**Slow your breathing.** Our mental and emotional states are reflective in the way we breathe. Our breath tends to become more rapid and shallow when we feel stressed, confused, tense, scared or angry. We tend to hold our breath, downshifting our brain from the cortex (the thinking and learning system) to the brain stem (the fight, flight or fear system), when we first become upset. Conscious, slow, deep breathing brings more oxygen to our lungs and our brains for greater clarity, calmness and energy. Breathing is one of the few physiological functions that is automatic, but is also under conscious control. It can up- shift your brain!

