

How Can I Manage Stress Better?

by Elizabeth Kwasniewski

Remember that most of our stress comes not from events and situations, but from how we interpret them.

Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions.

Pay attention to your distress. Don't ignore it. Don't gloss over your problems. Find out what events distress you. Ask yourself what it is about these events that is really upsetting. Determine how your body responds to the stress. Do you become nervous or physically upset? If so, in what specific ways?

Identify what you can change.

Can you change your stressors by avoiding or eliminating them completely? Can you reduce their intensity (manage them over a period of time instead of on a daily or weekly basis)? Can you shorten your exposure to stress (take a break, leave the physical premises)?

Reframing.

Ask yourself - "How else can I look at an upsetting situation? Is there another point of view I can take? Can I come up with other interpretations of a stressful event?"

Reframing other people's behavior.

We usually react not to what somebody does, but to our interpretation of why they did it. People's behavior is mostly about them, not about you. Start to notice how you talk to yourself about other people's behavior.

Modifying beliefs.

Phrases that include "should," "need to," "have to," or "must" are usually beliefs. Generalizations and judgments are also beliefs. Start to notice how your belief system may be influencing your daily choices. Pick one belief and try to modify or reword it so that it becomes less rigid.

Realistic expectations.

Try to articulate your expectations of a situation or a person that's bothering you right now. Ask yourself: "Am I expecting too much?" Adjust your expectations accordingly. Avoid perfectionism.

Talk it out.

"A problem shared is a problem halved." When something bothers you, confide in someone you can trust, as this proves to be a great release in itself.

Work it off.

Physical activity is one of the most effective ways to work off your anger or frustration. It will help relieve tension and promote a feeling of well-being.

Use relaxation techniques.

Practice relaxation exercises on a regular basis (abdominal breathing and progressive muscle relaxation; yoga, etc.).

Have a sense of humor.

This will help you see things in perspective. Learn to laugh at yourself from time to time. Humor is a wonderful stress reducer.

Source: D.Posen, *The Little Book of Stress Relief*, 2003.