

Stress-Management Skills

These techniques can help you cope with stress.

Deep Breathing

When you're under stress, muscles tense and breathing becomes shallow and rapid. Sit in a comfortable position and take deep, measured breaths. (Count from 1 to 4 while inhaling and 1 to 4 while exhaling.) Do this 20-30 times. Deep breathing increases the amount of oxygen available to your body and produces a relaxed feeling.

Progressive Relaxation

This technique is good to apply any time you're tense. Notice how your body feels as you tighten and relax certain muscles. Go from one muscle group to another, tensing and relaxing each for several seconds until all your muscles feel relaxed. Combine this with deep breathing and practice it daily. It's a good technique to use when you find yourself about to react negatively to stress.

Selective Awareness

This technique helps you focus on the positive aspects of stress. For example, if you're nervous about having to make a presentation in class, you can view it as an opportunity to work on your public speaking skills. Learning to interpret events in a positive rather than a negative light helps you develop lifelong coping skills.

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Sense of Humor

A sense of humor is the ability to laugh at a situation rather than at yourself or someone else. Sometimes tension can be eased when you find something lighthearted to think or say in a difficult situation. It's important to consider the circumstances. It may not be appropriate to use humor in all stressful situations.

Meditation

Meditation is the ability to sit quietly without distraction and to focus on breathing, a repetitive thought or a word (sometimes called a mantra). Concentrate on this for about 15 minutes and the physical symptoms that were elevated in response to stress will return to normal. Activities such as yoga often include meditation.

Physical Activity

Many people wonder why being active is a good way to relax. When the body works aerobically for about 30 minutes, endorphins are released. Endorphins are natural chemicals that help balance the effects of stress. Endorphin levels have been found to stay elevated even after physical activity has ended. People who are physically active every day cope better with stress and sleep more soundly at night.

Visual Imagery

Picturing yourself in a safe, beautiful place can be an effective relaxation technique. Choose a place you are familiar with, such as a deserted beach, a lush green meadow or a safe, peaceful place in your home. Practice deep breathing and progressive relaxation as you visualize yourself in this calm, serene place.