



LIFE REBALANCED

# STRESS RECOGNITION & STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

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## IMPORTANCE OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress is an automatic response for our body to protect itself from threats. This “fight or flight” sympathetic response is beneficial if you are in a life-threatening situation or require a short-term force of motivation. But, if you experience stress over a prolonged period of time, it could become chronic. Chronic stress can have serious consequences for your brain, body, and mind.

## PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND BEHAVIORAL SIGNS OF STRESS

- **Primary Physical Signs**
  - Accelerated Heart Beat
  - Nervous Stomach
  - Cold Hands or Feet
  - Sweaty Hands or Feet
  - Jittery Arms or Hands
  - Cold Chills
  - Tightened Muscles
  - Shallow or Rapid Breathing
  - Butterflies in Stomach
- **Secondary Physical Signs**
  - Headaches
  - Insomnia
  - Stomach disorders
  - Fatigue
  - Neck and Shoulder Tension
  - Chest Tension
  - Constipation/Diarrhea
- **Psychological Signs “Emotional”**
  - On edge
  - Guilt
  - Sadness
  - Worry
  - Blame

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- Fear
- Boredom
- Anger
- **Behavioral Signs**
  - Avoidance
  - Withdrawal
  - Aggression
  - Relationship problems
  - Procrastination
  - Hyperactivity
  - Substance Abuse (Food, Drugs, Alcohol)

## STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

### Never Hesitate to Seek Help from Licensed Mental Health Professionals

There is no shame in looking out for your well-being. Talking to a supportive, knowledgeable, and nonpartisan 3rd party is helpful for you and your relationships.

### Be Present, Self-Aware, and Non-Judgmental in Your Daily Activities

- **Meditation, Moving Meditation, or Mindfulness**
  - Relaxing in a Chair example: Close your eyes and notice your breath. Is your breathing shallow or deep? Is your abdomen moving with your inhalations and exhalations? Slow your breathing down and bring the breath down into your abdomen. Allow your mind to be silent. Focus on the space between your thoughts. If a thought comes, don't judge it, just acknowledge the thought and let it go. Return to noticing the breath and silence.
  - Walking example: Slowly walk outside for gentle exercise without headphones. Breathe the fresh outdoor air into your lungs and down into your abdomen. Feel your heel impact the sidewalk and transfer weight to the ball, then to the big toe. Feel your arms swing and your leg muscles propelling you forward. Feel the wind in your hair. Feel the warmth of the sunshine. Listen to children playing and laughing. Smile at strangers.
- **Practice Abdominal Breathing** (proper breathing that activates the vagus nerve, which stimulates the parasympathetic system - "rest and digest").
  - Abdominal Breathing Instructions:
    - Keep shoulders and chest relaxed.
    - Place hand on abdomen.
    - Gently inhale through nose. You should feel your abdomen move away from you. You should NOT feel your shoulders or chest rise.



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- Exhale through your mouth. Feel your abdomen deflate back towards you.
  - Practice this while lying on your bed, watching TV, or standing up.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**
  - Do sitting or lying down. Lying down or reclined works best because your back muscles don't have to support your body.
  - Substitute PMR for clenching teeth or maladaptive coping behaviors such as smoking or overeating.
  - A simple series of tension/release intervals moving progressively from one muscle group of the body to the next.
  - **PMR Technique:** Before any action, simply notice how that body part feels.
    - Next, tense the muscles hard for about 5 seconds, inhaling as you tense.
    - Then relax and exhale slowly and fully. Just let your muscles relax. Notice what it feels like to be relaxed.
    - See detailed PMR handout.
- **Socialize and Laugh**
- **Gentle and Consistent Exercise, such as, Walking, Qi Gong, Tai Chi, and/or Restorative Yoga**
- **Help Others**
- **Occasional Massage**
- **Eat a Healthy Diet**
  - Avoid foods high in fat and sugar. Omega-3 fatty acids are beneficial (wild caught salmon, vegetable oils, walnuts, flax seeds, flax oil, and leafy vegetables).
  - Discuss your diet and medical conditions with a physician and/or registered dietician.
- **Self-Hypnosis**
  - Hypnosis is a state of concentration and increased attention. It is difficult to induce yourself into a hypnotic state without guidance from a hypnotist, but you will benefit from a daily practice of relaxing yourself and giving yourself a positive suggestion.
  - **Brief Technique:** Decide which suggestion you want to give yourself. Start by daydreaming that you are in a beautiful, peaceful place. Use progressive muscle relaxation to become more relaxed in your peaceful place. Next, count yourself down a beautiful staircase of TEN to ONE. At the bottom of the staircase, give yourself the suggestion. Then, go back up the staircase and take a deep breath as you open your eyes. Take your time getting up.
- **8 Hours of Deep Sleep (rest and restore)**
  - Quit caffeine, if needed; it is a stimulant.

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- Listen to Yoga Nidra for Sleep or other sleep guided meditations to aid falling asleep.
- Be consistent with daily activities and bed times.
- All of the above stress management techniques used during the day also increase quality of sleep.

## BE FLEXIBLE....CHANGE HAPPENS AND IS A CONSTANT IN LIFE

- Be objective and change your expectations.
- Change your behaviors as needed.

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