

# Coping With Stress

Stress is a natural part of life. You can feel physical stress when you have too much to do, or when you've had too little sleep, aren't eating properly or have been ill. Stress can also be emotional: you can feel it when you worry about money, your job or a loved one's illness, or when you experience a devastating life event, such as the death of a spouse or the loss of a job. When stress is not addressed, it can affect many parts of your life, including your productivity and performance on the job. In fact, workplace stress causes about 1 million U.S. employees to miss work each day.

The key to coping with stress is to determine your personal tolerance levels for stressful situations. You must learn to accept or change stressful or tense situations whenever possible. Some of the following suggestions may help immediately, but if your stress is constant, it may require more attention or even lifestyle changes.

- **Take one thing at a time.** Pick one urgent task and work on it. When that's done, move on to the next.
- **Be realistic.** If you're overwhelmed at home or at work, learn to say, "No!"
- **Don't try to be superman/superwoman.** No one is perfect; don't expect perfection from yourself.
- **Visualize.** Use your imagination to see how you can manage a stressful situation at work or home more effectively.
- **Meditate.** Five to 10 minutes of quiet reflection can bring some relief. If you're having a stressful day at work, close your door and meditate or go for a quick walk to clear your mind.
- **Exercise.** Thirty minutes of physical activity per day helps both body and mind. If you have an hour lunch break at the office, use half of it for a walk or a jog. Make plans with a coworker to do this a few times a week.
- **Hobbies.** Take a break and do something you enjoy.
- **Adopt a healthy lifestyle.** Get adequate rest, eat right, exercise, limit your use of caffeine and alcohol, and balance work and play.
- **Share your feelings.** Don't try to cope alone. Let friends and family provide support and guidance.
- **Be flexible!** Whether you're at home or at work, arguing only increases stress. If you feel you're right, stand your ground, but do so calmly and rationally. Be prepared to make allowances for other people's opinions and to compromise.
- **Don't be overly critical.** Remember, everyone is unique and has his or her own virtues and shortcomings.

You can ease stress by talking with friends or family. But, if that isn't enough, talk with your doctor, spiritual advisor or employee assistance program (EAP). They may suggest that you see a mental health professional to help you manage your stress or suggest other resources. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness; it's a healthy thing to do.

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