



MANAGING STRESS AND OVERWHELM

In Very Hard Times

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.

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Identifying Stress

We all feel overwhelmed and stressed at different times in our lives, and these stress levels can rise when our surroundings feel uncertain and uneasy. With an unpredictable future ahead of us, hospitals at capacity, schools and restaurants closed, and grocery stores aisles emptied, it is no wonder that we have felt a collective state of anxiety recently.

During overwhelming times like these, it is important to do self-reflection and sit with our emotions regularly. In doing this, we can recognize exactly what is making us anxious and identify whether or not it is in our control. Over time, you will realize that you are giving unnecessary amounts of energy to things that you cannot change and are reacting to your emotions rather than accepting them and learning how to move forward and let go of worry.



Before discussing how to get rid of unnecessary stress and let go of the things making you anxious, it is important to understand and recognize stressful situations. Stress is the way that our bodies respond to changes and pressures from our environments or particular situations.

Stress can appear in many forms besides the natural feeling of being overwhelmed. Symptoms of stress can include low energy, headaches, an uneasy stomach or nausea, and even more serious signs such as chest pain and a rapid heartbeat.

Over time, stress can cause many negative health impacts and be detrimental to our mental and physical wellbeing. Chronic stress in the long term can lead to heart disease, depression, personality disorders, and high blood pressure. Stress can take years off of our lives and can impact our relationships with others and overall satisfaction with life. These are just a few of the

reasons why it is crucial to analyze our stress and determine solutions that can benefit our unique situations.

Causes of Stress

Stress is caused by a variety of factors and appears at different times for every individual. As students, we may feel stressed about our friends, schoolwork, and balancing our time between jobs and school. As we get older, stress can appear in ways such as financial obligations, illness or injury, loss around us, problems in our relationships, and other pressures that life may throw at us.

Being in a stressful situation causes our nervous, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems to change because of the way the chemicals in our body react. This causes an increase in heart rate, alters breathing patterns, and adrenaline production. Stressful situations require a lot of our energy and can be exhausting emotionally, physically, and mentally.



How Current Events Impact Stress

It is human nature to pick up on the collective energy of our surroundings and allow it to impact our behavior and emotions. During frightening and unpredictable times like these, the stress we already have will likely feel intensified. When we see people around us losing their jobs and living without income, it is normal to feel financial pressure and worry around our own job stability and play out potential scenarios in our heads.

When we see hospitals at capacity, it is normal to fear that ourselves or our loved ones may fall ill which gives us anxiety for our future. When the news about what is happening in our communities and the country around us seems very negative and frightening, it is normal to fear for our lives and the safety of our families and friends.

These are just a few of the ways that our surroundings impact our stress levels, especially for those who already have an anxiety disorder or other mental health problems. However, it is important to identify what parts of our stress are out of our control and let go of trying to predict and understand an uncertain future.

9 Ways To Manage Stress

There are many ways to let go of the stress going on during trying times and overcome the negative emotions and the worry that is taking over your wellbeing. It is important to realize that you are not powerless and that this is an important time for self-growth and self-improvement that can allow you to fully understand your anxiety and determine what works best for you.

Let Go of Expectations

When you try to plan out scenarios in your head of what could happen in the future, you are wasting energy on things that are out of your control. The most important skill to develop when attempting to overcome anxiety is learning how to be in the present moment.

Expectations can cause negative self-talk and constant worry that consumes your energy levels and can have detrimental impacts on your mental health and confidence. It is important to let go of these fears and expectations by being more flexible and understanding how to go with the flow.

Another way to let go of expectations is by accepting what is and letting yourself stay in the present moment. When thoughts and scenarios start to repeat in your mind, it is important to tell yourself that you will cross those bridges when you get there and that the only thing you choose to focus on is the power of now. Repeating mantras like these to replace your fears and worries can allow you to let go of uncertainty.

Breathing and Meditation

When you are stuck at home and feeling isolated and overwhelmed with intense emotions, you may want to pick up a spiritual practice that you can eventually incorporate into your daily routine. One of the best practices to calm the mind and ease anxiety and stress is meditation.

Meditation allows you to recognize your thoughts from an outside perspective and dive deeper into the reason these fears may be arising in order to let go of them and change the way you view your surroundings. Meditation is a great way to clear your mind of your fears and stress and learn how to be present and more accepting of the world.

Meditating for just 20 minutes each day has been proven to positively impact your mental, emotional, and physical state and reduce anxiety and stress levels drastically. It may be helpful to start with a guided meditation in order to pick up strategies and techniques to clear your mind and learn what works best for you.



Another practice that can be helpful when you find yourself stressing about little things throughout the day and feeling pressured and overwhelmed is deep breathing. There are thousands of different breathing techniques that can help you overcome your anxiety and calm you down during stressful moments.

One common breathing technique is the 4-7-8 breathing technique that is a pattern to help you fall asleep easier or calm you down when your heart is racing, and you are overwhelmed.

- It requires taking a step back from what you are working on, breathing in for four seconds, holding the breath for seven seconds, and then exhaling for eight.

According to Dr. Weil, director of the University of Arizona Center for medicine, practicing this breathing technique twice a day allows you to see long term benefits and recommends doing four cycles in a row when trying to fall asleep or calm down.

Learning how to meditate and practice different breathing techniques allows you to stay in control of your mind and body, especially when times feel overwhelming. This will also prevent you from constantly letting your energy be consumed by stress so that you can focus on the important things that you need to get done.

Reduce Your News Intake

Although staying up to date with current events and certain safety precautions and guidelines that the news provides, it can be stressful and overwhelming to watch when uncertainty arises.

Many of the topics discussed on the news are presented in ways that are detrimental to mental health and are very worrisome and unsettling. Especially during times like these, the news has a negativity bias that makes us fear for our futures, so it is normal to feel overwhelmed when watching and reading it.

The news can consume large amounts of your energy, and make you feel worried and anxious about the future. However, it is important to recognize that many of these worries and fears are out of your control. By taking breaks from the news and limiting the sources that you check throughout the day, you can relieve your mind of things that are out of your control and focus on your responsibilities and ways to improve yourself.

Exercise

When you feel your energy being consumed by stress, it is very likely that you are bottling up anxiety and worry and staying active is a great way to prevent this cycle. Tons of research has proven that exercise is one of the most important stress relievers and ways to improve your mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

Exercising improves your sleep quality, reduces cortisol and other stress hormones, and distracts your mind in order to calm you down and let your stress out. According to an article published in

Harvard Health, aerobic exercise stimulates the production of endorphins, which increase happiness levels and are natural painkillers.

The discipline that exercise gives you allows you to be more motivated and productive, which improves your mindset and allows you to be mentally stronger. There are so many benefits that exercise provides for your health, wellbeing, and stress levels that make it an essential thing to incorporate into your daily routine. Even during times like this, it is important to make an effort to stay physically active at least five days a week in order to keep you feeling energized and less worried.

Workouts That Help Stress

- Running
- Walking
- Aerobics Classes
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Gym Machines
- Jump rope
- Circuit Training
- Stair steppers
- Elliptical machines
- Kickboxing
- Cycling
- Basketball
- Any activity that elevates the heart rate and gets the heart pumping

Reading and Writing

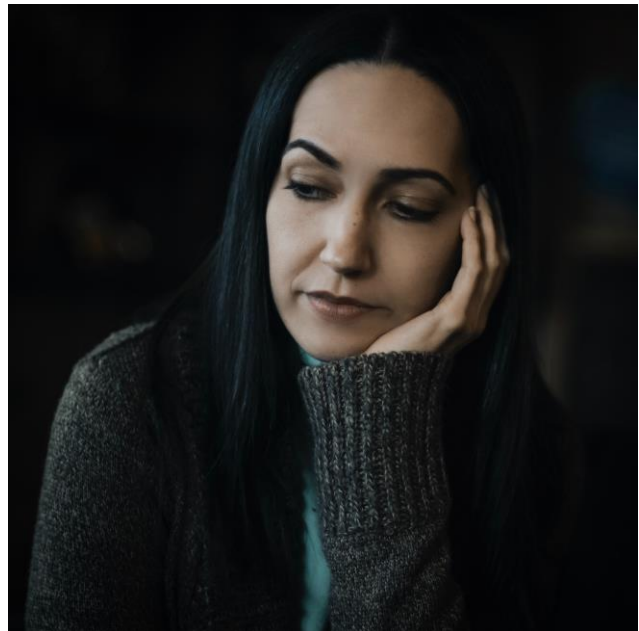
Reading and writing are two very important techniques to keep yourself mentally strong and improve your cognitive abilities. Reading allows you to relieve stress because you enter into a virtual world that distracts you from stressful events that may be occurring in your surroundings.

The different scenarios written in books are ways to free your mind and entertain yourself while relaxing your mind. It allows you to clear your head and step out of your mind so that you are more prepared to deal with and react to the stress occurring in your life in a mature and positive way.

One more way that reading can help during times of stress is by being an educational source to fuel your mind. When you feel cooped up in the house and are not interacting with friends and strangers on a daily basis, you will begin to feel lonely. Reading educational material provides you with a source to learn from and develop positive habits, which is a great way to grow within yourself.

Writing is another therapeutic practice that can also be educational in many ways. When you write down the different thoughts flowing through your mind and the things that are causing you anxiety, you can reflect on them from an outside perspective and come to terms with your emotions. This can also help you to understand patterns of where your stress may be coming from and solutions may appear in front of you.

When you feel like there is a lot of stress going on in your mind and you are under a lot of pressure, it may feel like you have a lot of things bottled up and stuck in your head. This causes your brain to hold onto thoughts that may be hurting your wellbeing, and writing is a great way to relieve this.



Writing down what is occurring in your life, what may be stressing you out, and what you are grateful for allows you to let go of your thoughts and review and evaluate your situations. This

will lead you to break free from the stress that may feel like it is controlling you and let go of what is out of your control.

Hobbies

One great way to distract your mind and maintain a level of mental stability during uncertain and unpredictable times is to keep up with hobbies. Whether it be playing board games, painting, yoga, or crafts, there are so many different ways to keep your mind occupied even when you feel trapped in the house.

Keeping your mind focused on something that is enjoyable and entertaining is a great way to relieve your stress and feel satisfied at the end of the day. With negativity around us and a lack of human interaction, hobbies are a great way to keep morale high and stay busy.

Hobbies are important for people who are stressed, even though they are often thought of as only good for people with tons of free time. According to a Very Well Mind article, hobbies bring benefits that are well worth the time spent because of the impacts they can have on your mental and physical wellbeing.

Research has shown that relaxing the mind can lower your levels of cortisol and blood pressure and leave you more energized to complete more important responsibilities. These are just a few of the ways that keeping up with a hobby can reduce your stress and calm the mind.

Self-Care

Taking time to truly take care of yourself is crucial during unsettling and stressful times. There are so many different ways to practice self-care, and now is a great time to start. Taking a bath before bed, doing a face mask, playing with your dog, watching a comedy or nourishing your skin are a few forms of self-care that make you feel better about yourself and will leave you in a state of relaxation.

Self-care gives you an emotional vacation that is very necessary when you feel overwhelmed and under large amounts of pressure. It allows you to distract your mind and release the stress that may be coming from your surroundings. Independence is very important when learning how to reduce stress, because everyone functions in different ways and you must learn what works best for you.

Maintain a Morning Routine

One of the most beneficial strategies for balancing your stress levels and calming your mind is a proper morning routine. Even when you are stuck at home, having stability to start your day balances your mind and body and keeps you motivated and productive.

Your daily routine also allows you to have a better sleep schedule and keep you waking up at the same time each day, so you have more time in the day to complete your responsibilities. When you schedule a time to do things like meditate, exercise, and journal, you are keeping yourself accountable to check in with your mental and physical health.

One way to create a routine that you will stick to is by taking notes about what you do each morning, what you would like to incorporate into each day, and how much time you want to reserve for each task. Once you do this for about a week, sit down and observe your notes in order to write out a routine that is attainable and manageable for you.

You will notice in a short amount of time the different ways that structure and taking control of your day will reduce your anxiety and benefit you in the long term.

Healthy Food Choices

A healthy diet is one of the best ways that you can take care of your mind and body when you are under any amount of stress. When you are under a lot of pressure, your body consumes a lot

of energy through worry and anxiety, so it is important that you are fueling it properly. This will reduce the impacts that stress has on your wellbeing and allow you to think more clearly.

Healthy foods have the ability to reduce inflammation and positively impact blood flow and blood pressure.

- Nutrients like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables will provide you with the energy you need to stay in control and fight stress.
- Foods full of Omega-3s like salmon and tuna have great impacts on stress and keep your body functioning properly.

Although it can be easy to head to the fast-food restaurant or the junk food part of your pantry to get comfort food for temporary stress relief, this makes your situation much worse and takes the energy that you need away. Consume healthy foods during stressful situations in order to be more prepared to resolve inner conflict and handle situations in a more positive way.

Final Thoughts

During troubling times like these, our minds are under large amounts of pressure and stress due to outside factors. The news and other media outlets can provide us with information that causes us to feel anxious and overwhelmed.

Many of the situations that are stressing us out are out of our control, and it is very important to acknowledge that and figure out ways that we can let go of these pressures. This will keep our mental and physical health stable and allow us to make the best use of our time while being in control of the day.

Developing a structured routine during times of uncertainty that incorporates physical activity, meditation, and deep breathing, writing for self-reflection, and hobbies are some of the best ways to keep your mental health on track. Routines keep you accountable to take care of yourself and put your best put forward when dealing with difficult times.