

STRESS

We all experience stress - its part of being human. Believe it or not, stress is not always a “bad” thing! In fact, experiencing “optimal” stress energizes and motivates us, allowing us to overcome obstacles and rise to the challenges we face. Because no two people are the same, we all experience stress in different ways. We and may feel the effects of stress at different points and react to different stressors. Too much stress (or prolonged stress) can negatively impact physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing, making it difficult to cope.

You might recognize some of these common signs of stress from your own experience:

Emotional:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling out of control
- Worrying, obsessing
- Irritability, frustration
- Mood swings, crying spells
- Boredom, lack of interest
- Feeling helpless/inadequate

Cognitive:

- Difficulty making choices
- Feeling "out of it"
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor memory
- Racing/repetitive thoughts

Physical:

- Muscle tightness
- Headaches
- Quick heart/breathing rate
- Fatigue
- Appetite/weight change
- Gastrointestinal discomfort

Behavioral:

- Increased substance use
- Over- or under-eating

- Short temper
- Increased nervous habits
- Too much or too little sleep

Fortunately, there are some great strategies for reducing unproductive stress and using productive stress to our advantage. Try out a few of these strategies to see what works best for you. Remember, we're all different, so it's okay if your strategies look different than others' as long as it's what's best for you!

Reduce Stress:

- When possible eliminate unnecessary stressors from your life/schedule
- Limit energy and time devoted to highly stressful activities, relationships, thoughts
- Use time management and organization skills to decrease excess stress
- Journal to get stressors down on paper and off your mind
- Get plenty of physical activity to release stress and tension
- Be aware of your reactions, noticing ways your reactions may be amplifying stress
- Take breaks to recharge

Reframe Stress:

- Remember, stress is normal and experienced by everyone
- Differentiate between productive and unproductive stress
- Recognize ways that stress keeps you energized and motivated
- Be curious about reactions to stress, don't avoid the feelings
- Instead of getting upset about your body's reactions to stress, recognize them as normal, and appreciate what your body does for you
- Keep timeframes in mind – feelings do not last forever and neither does stress

Handouts/Websites

American Psychological Association: Stress

American Institute of Stress

Mayo Clinic: Stress Basics

MedlinePlus: Stress

Health Disparities and Stress

Ethnicity and Health in the African American Community

Podcasts/Videos

Podcast: The Wellness Couch: Be the Queen of Your Stress with Maria Zuschmann

Podcast: Tranquility du Jour with Kimberly Wilson

Podcast: Invisibilia by NPR

TED Talk: David Levitin, “How to Stay Calm When You Know You’ll Be Stressed”

TED Talk: Kelly McGonigal, “How to Make Stress Your Friend”

TED Talk: Ashley McGirt, “Dying While Black: Links Between Mental Health, Chronic Stress, & Death”

Books

Anxiety and Stress Reduction Workbook

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle

A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook

The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It