



Pro Kinship for Kids

Kinship Link

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Pro Kinship for Kids

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Stress Management

While it may seem like there's nothing you can do about stress at work and home, there are steps you can take to relieve the pressure and regain control. Managing stress is very important for yourself. If you're living with high levels of stress, you're putting your entire well-being at risk. Stress wreaks havoc on your emotional balance, as well as your physical health. It narrows your ability to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life. It may seem like there's nothing you can do about stress. The bills won't stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day, and your work and family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think.

Effective stress management helps you break the hold stress has on your life, so you can be happier, healthier, and more productive. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun - and the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on. The following stress management tips can help you find what works for you.

Tip 1: Identify the sources of stress in your life

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. This isn't as straightforward as it sounds. While it's easy to identify major stressors such as changing jobs, moving, or going through a divorce, pinpointing the sources of chronic stress can be more complicated. It's all too easy to overlook how your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors contribute to your everyday stress levels. To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:

- Do you explain away stress as temporary even though you can't remember the last time you took a breather?
- Do you define stress as an integral part of your work or home life or as a part of your personality?
- Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional?

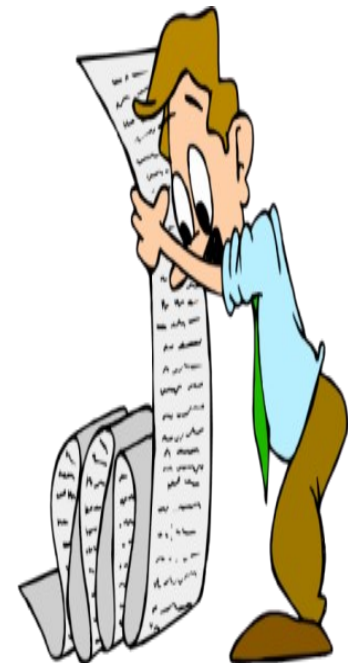
Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating and maintaining it, your stress level will remain outside your control.

Start a stress journal

A stress journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal or use a stress tracker on your phone. Keeping a daily log will enable you to see patterns and common themes.

Write down:

- What caused your stress.
- How you felt, both physically and emotionally.
- How you acted in response.
- What you did to make yourself feel better.



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Tip 2: Practice the 4 A's of stress management

While stress is an automatic response from your nervous system, some stressors arise at predictable times: a meeting with your boss, or family gatherings, for example. When handling such predictable stressors, you can either change the situation, or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose in any given situation, it's helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.

Avoid unnecessary stress

- Learn how to say "No". Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- Avoid people who stress you out. If someone consistently causes stress in your life, limit the amount of time you spend with that person, or end the relationship.
- Take control of your environment.
- Pare down your to-do list.

Alter the situation

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. Be more assertive and communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Create a balanced schedule. Try to find a balance between work and family life, social activities and solitary pursuits, daily responsibilities and downtime.

Adapt to the stressor

- Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective.
- Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough".

- Practice gratitude. When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Accept the things you can't change

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control, particularly the behavior of other people.
- Look for the upside. When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth.
- Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.
- Share your feelings. Expressing what you're going through can be very freeing, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.

Tip 3: Get moving

When you're stressed, the last thing you probably feel like doing is getting up and exercising. But physical activity is a huge stress reliever. Exercise releases endorphins that make you feel good, and it can also serve as a valuable distraction from your daily worries. While you'll get the most benefit from regularly exercising for 30 minutes or more, it's okay to build up your fitness level gradually. The first step is to get yourself up and moving. Here are some easy ways to incorporate exercise into your daily schedule:

- Put on some music and dance around.
- Take your dog for a walk.
- Walk or bike to the grocery store.
- Use the stairs at home or work rather than an elevator.
- Park your car in the farthest spot in the lot and walk the rest of the way.

- Pair up with an exercise partner and encourage each other as you workout.
- Play ping-pong or an activity-based video game with your kids.

The stress-busting magic of mindful rhythmic exercise is great. While just about any form of physical activity can help burn away tension and stress, rhythmic activities are especially effective. Good choices include walking, running, swimming, dancing, cycling, tai chi, and aerobics. Whatever you choose, make sure it's something you enjoy so you're more likely to stick with it. While you're exercising, make a conscious effort to pay attention to your body and the physical (and sometimes emotional) sensations you experience as you're moving. Focus on coordinating your breathing with your movements, for example, or notice how the air or sunlight feels on your skin. Adding this mindfulness element will help you break out of the cycle of negative thoughts that often accompanies overwhelming stress.

Tip 4: Connect to others

There is nothing more calming than spending quality time with another human being who makes you feel safe and understood. In fact, face-to-face interaction triggers a cascade of hormones that counteracts the body's defensive "fight-or-flight" response. It's nature's natural stress reliever, and as an added bonus, it also helps stave off depression and anxiety. So make it a point to connect regularly - and in person - with family and friends. Keep in mind that people you talk to don't



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have to be able to fix your stress. They simply need to be good listeners. Try not to let worries about looking weak or being a burden keep you from opening up. The people who care about you will be flattered by your trust. It will only strengthen your bond.

Building Friendships

Some days it may feel like you don't have any close friends. You may feel like everyone has a best friend except for you. A true friend is someone who cares about what you care about, someone who likes to spend time with you, and someone who helps make your day a little brighter. A true friend is someone who takes action. Ask yourself if you are this type of friend to others. A true friendship takes effort. There are many benefits to friendships. Strong friendships are a critical aspect of most people's emotional well-being. Research indicates that close friendships are associated with greater happiness, self-esteem, and sense of purpose. These bonds are even associated with physical outcomes, such as lower blood pressure and a longer lifespan. Friendship creates a foundation through which we can develop social skills, advance our careers, and enjoy compassion and support.

Tips for building relationships:

- Value yourself. Be confident and happy being you.
- Help someone else by volunteering.
- Spend time with others. Accept them as they are, be open, value their feelings and options.
- Have lunch or coffee with a friend.
- Care about what others care about.
- Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly.
- Be there when your friend needs you. Be present, put away your cell phone, turn off the TV, and really listen.
- Call or email an old friend.
- Schedule a weekly dinner date.

- Confide in a pastor, teacher, or sports coach.
- Be kind. Kindness is irresistible.

Tip 5: Make time for fun and relaxation

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors.

- **Set aside leisure time.** This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.
- **Take up a relaxation practice.** As you learn and practice how to relax by finding a restfulness your stress levels will decrease and your mind and body will become calm and centered.



Tip 6: Manage your time better

Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. The good news is there are things you can do to achieve a healthier work-life balance.

- **Don't over-commit yourself.** All too often, we underestimate how long things will take.

- **Prioritize tasks.** Make a list of tasks you have to do, and tackle them in order of importance. Do the high-priority items first. If you have something particularly unpleasant or stressful to do, get it over with early. The rest of your day will be more pleasant as a result.
- **Break projects into small steps.** Focus on one manageable step at a time, rather than taking on everything at once.
- **Delegate responsibility.** Let go of the desire to control or oversee every little step.

Tip 7: Maintain balance with a healthy lifestyle

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end with a crash in mood and energy.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.** Deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

Tip 8: Learn to relieve stress in the moment

The fastest way to reduce stress is by taking a deep breath and using your senses - what you see, hear, taste, and touch - or through a soothing movement. By viewing a favorite photo, smelling a specific scent, listening to a favorite piece of music, tasting a piece of gum, or hugging a pet, for example, you can quickly relax and focus yourself.