

The 5 Paths to Relieving Stress

Managing stress is a life skill that takes intentional commitment. While living a completely stress-free life may not be possible, *it is possible to hone healthy coping habits to relieve stress.*

Combine any or all of these five paths to boost your results!

Path 1: Break the Crazy Cycle and Embrace a Healthy Cycle

Stress throws your emotional equilibrium and physical health into chaos. Living with high stress levels puts your entire well-being at risk. It destroys your ability to be productive, think clearly, and find joy. Combatting stress is not losing battle. You have more control than you think. It's all about perspective and reality.

First, let's focus on getting happier and healthier. Thinking clearly and higher productivity will be a natural effect of living a lower stress life.

Strike a Balance

Ideally, we want to find balance. Too much of anything wreaks havoc on the mind. You want time for work, time for play, time for relationships, and time to rest. Real rest. Mastering this balance leads to resilience so you can withstand the pressures of daily life.

Stress Management is not a one-size-fits-all approach. You must find the right combination of strategies below and you'll conquer the Stress Monster.

Name the Beast

Identify your stressors

Seriously. Name them, all of them. Expose the culprits for what they are - chaos makers! Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. This isn't as simple as it sounds. It's easy to say you lost a job or are having a baby. It's harder to identify thoughts and feelings that trigger emotional behaviors as stressors. WHOA! That's heavy. Yeah, I know. Looming deadlines for school or work are stressful, but so is procrastination or lack of resources, too. It's not a simple answer.

Expose your stressors

Expose your true stressors by examining your habits. This will provide keen insight into hidden stressors.

- Do you describe stress as a temporary event? "I have so much going on right now," but cannot remember your last day off.
- Is stress part of your home or work life? "Life is so crazy," or "this place is just nuts!"
- Is someone else to blame for your stress? It's never you, it's an outside event or person.

Acceptance is always the first step

Realize you are responsible for your own stress and how you create, nurture, and maintain it.

Journaling Really Works!

Journals help with all sorts of things. You have to name thoughts, feelings, ideas, and emotions when you write. You cannot shrug on paper. Writing, “I’m fine,” is just lying to yourself. Journaling for only 4 minutes a day helps clarify thoughts. You’ll feel less stressed the more you develop this habit. There are some great journaling apps out there to keep your journal at your fingertips. So go ahead, channel your inner Doogie Howser!

Path 2: Get All A’s

Stress arises predictably throughout the day. Think about it, getting the kids out the door, commuting, meetings, even family-time. So, what should you do? You’ve got some choices:

Avoid, Alter, Adapt, and Accept.

Well, you could ignore your kids and their shoes, but that’s likely not really going to work. In this case you might alter the morning routine; or just accept that it really does take 22 minutes to get out the door.

Avoid stressful situations

Avoiding stressful situations that need your attention isn’t healthy (or wise). You might be surprised there are plenty of stressors you could eliminate from daily living. Start being mindful of body tension throughout the day to identify your stressful situations. You might be able to cut some of them out all together!

Say No

No is a complete sentence and requires no explanation. You can say no and no one dies. Seriously. It means knowing your boundaries and not apologizing for knowing them!

Avoid people who stress you out

You know them, the people who say, “I hate drama,” are the Drama Queens! Protect yourself!

Set the tone

In the same vein, control your environment. Turn off the news, power down your phone (or at least set it out of arm’s reach). You are the boss of your technology, it’s not the boss of you.

Write it down

Use your calendar and your journal to *make real lists that you actually have time to do*. That ever growing honey-do list can get chucked. Instead, when you have a task that needs to be done, put it on the calendar and *let yourself visualize how much time that task really takes*. You won’t overload yourself with needless, random tasks and instead actually accomplish the important things.

Alter

Shift your perspective on how you view a stressful situation. The easiest way to do this is to tell the story of your situation or challenge from an opposing viewpoint. Everyone thinks their way is right and is doing the best they can. So when you shift your perspective, you might often tap into grace.

Express those feelings

Advocate for yourself when something or someone is bothering you. Express your communications in a healthy, respectful way. If you don't give voice to your feelings and instead keep them bottled up, stress manifests and resentment builds. Remember, when you communicate your feelings with someone, be willing to find a middle ground for a solution. Do your part to find success.

Adapt

When in Rome ...

So, you don't want to be nutty in an office that's just plain crazy? Yeah, I get that. Adapt or die is real. This is about perspective and reframing. Will I care about this in a year? Next month? Next week?

Adjust expectations

Unmet expectations are an enormous source of stress. Unmet expectations lead to frustration and anger. Typically, poor communication is the culprit here. Ask as many questions as possible to avoid the pitfall altogether.

Practice gratitude

This is overused and yet so powerful. Choosing thankfulness and gratitude truly shifts your attitude.

Acceptance

There's a reason this is in the serenity prayer. "... serenity to accept the things I cannot change ..."

Control is a facade

You don't have control over the things that happen in life. Not really. People who face unimaginable tragedies learn this lesson the hard way and it shifts their perspective. This doesn't mean we don't make plans and steward our resources well. It means that we find the best path towards a goal instead of steamrolling over others to an elusive, invisible finish line we've developed in our own minds.

Find the upside

Declare the silver lining in the situation. Celebrate the lessons learned in the face of failure. No one likes a life lesson in the middle of it.

Choose joy

Not happiness. Joy. They are different. Joy comes from within. Happiness is dependent on circumstance. Find your inner joy and it will radiate from you infecting and influencing others.

Forgive

If you are lucky enough to be able to forgive, you are lucky, indeed. Harboring ill will only hurts you. Go back to perspective: Will this matter in a week? A month? A year? Let that stuff go and move on! Life is too short to let others live rent free in your brain.

[Help.com](#) talks about the Four A's of Stress Management to conquer stress.

Path 3: Movement Matters**Bodies in motion stay in motion, bodies at rest, stay at rest**

You know you feel better when you move around. When you're stressed out, the last thing you feel like doing is exercising.

Physical activity is a stress buster!

Exercise releases endorphins that make you feel good. PLUS, you cannot think about all the stressors of the day when you're exercising, so it serves as a healthy distraction from your stressors.

Do Something. Anything!

Build up your fitness level gradually to 30 minutes or longer at least three times a week. Starting from nothing, zero activity? That's okay! Walking is a great way to start. Remember, anything is better than not exercising at all. Small activities add up over the course of a day. The first step is to get yourself up and moving. Here are some easy ways to incorporate exercise into your daily schedule:

- Channel your inner Grey's and Dance it Out.
- Got a pooch? Take him for a walk!
- Don your helmet and bike to the store.
- Park further away from an entrance, take the stairs.
- Pop in your earbuds and go for a walk outside!
- Play with your kids.
- Stretch! If you tend to be inactive, this is a great way to start moving!

Need a little boost?

Partner up with a friend. Join a class or bootcamp. Try out swimming laps or cycling. Whatever you do, try it a few times to see when it fits in best with your daily schedule, what instructors or classmates you might prefer. It all matters!

Be Mindful!

While you're moving that body, pay attention! Your body, your muscles, your nerves -- they'll all talk to you. Focus on your breathing, notice the breeze or sunlight on your skin. Adding mindfulness helps break the cycle of negative thoughts that accompanies stress.

Connect

We were made for face-to-face fellowship. Spending quality time with another human being who makes you feel safe and understood relieves stress by triggering a cascade of hormones that counteracts the body's defensive "fight-or-flight" response. It's nature's natural stress reliever (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.

10 Things to Try This Today

1. Reach out to a colleague at work.
2. Help someone else by volunteering.
3. Have lunch or coffee with a friend, in person or virtually.
4. Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly. Check in on a loved one regularly.
5. Run an errand for someone who cannot.
6. Call or email an old friend.
7. Go for a walk with a neighbor or friend.
8. Schedule a recurring dinner date - even if it's only fast food.
9. Try a Meet Up and expand your circle.
10. Confide in a clergy member, teacher, or sports coach.

Path 4: Time to Yourself

Nurturing yourself is a necessity. Make "me-time" a priority. Plan yourself some fun and relaxation and then tackle life's stressors like a boss.

Plan for Relaxation

Include rest and relaxation in your daily agenda - items to cross off your to-do list that are as important as the big meeting or doing laundry.

Do One Thing You Enjoy Every Single Day

Whether it's taking time for a song on the piano or belting out lyrics during your commute, own that time and relish in the joy you derive from such a small luxury.

Laugh

Keep your sense of humor. Laugh at yourself. Laugh with others. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress.

Meditation

Take up a relaxation practice. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response and it only takes a few minutes. This opposes the fight or flight stress response. As you learn and practice these techniques, your stress levels will decrease and your mind and body will become calm and centered.

The Elusive Time Management Secret

It's hard to stay calm when you're stretched too thin and running behind schedule. Learning to schedule white space or margin into your days and weeks provides the buffer you need to feel less stressed.

Spread it Out

Avoid back-to-back scheduling. Squeezing everything into one day means we don't fully invest in any one of those things. Spreading it out helps us enjoy the items on our calendar.

Prioritize

The really important things always get done. Make a list of what needs to happen then prioritize the list. Then take it a step further, estimate the amount of time something will take (and be honest). One mom found out it only takes 8 minutes to mop the kitchen floor. There may be more time to do things than you think - or there may be less.

Train Others to do Your Job

Delegation is challenging and worth every minute of the time you invest. It's hard to release control. Remember, someone had to release their control over you and your responsibilities so you could manage a specific task. Invest in others and you'll let go of unnecessary stress in the process and build up someone else in the process.

Path 5: Make Good Choices

Yep, now it's time for diet and exercise - a key component of stress management.

Nourish Your Body

Fuel your body to best cope with life's stressors

Be mindful of what you eat. There are plenty of great apps to keep you on target and encouraged.

Limit caffeine and sugar

These highs inevitably lead to lows or crashes. You'll feel more relaxed and sleep better when you reduce your caffeine, sugar, and chocolate intake.

Self-medicating doesn't help

Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs. Need something more than what we've covered? Please see your physician to get the help you need. [nZone](#) is powered by [New Life Christian Church](#) with a slew of resources at our disposal. Our mission field is our community. We can help, too -- and we want to!

Don't Sleep on Sleep

Lack of Sleep can seriously make you crazy, alter your metabolism, and more. Create an evening ritual to wind down - just like we do with our babies and toddlers. Low lights and sounds, a warm shower, a fun novel - these all contribute to winding down the day.

Get Grounded

It's crazy. You're spinning. You're stuck in a traffic jam. You're late. The kids. The spouse. The boss. The argument. Whatever it is, is a symptom of a greater stressor. So, in the moment - just breathe. Take a beat. Control your breathing. Tap lightly on your forehead for one minute. Quick stress relievers to cut the tension and stop a hazardous reaction.

Ground yourself!

Ground yourself by engaging your senses: 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste (keep gum or mints handy).

THE POWER OF ONE

Focus on small, incremental changes to make changes that really stick. **It's time to take action!**

1. What ONE timeframe of your day do you want to focus on first?
2. What ONE THING will you do today to make a change?
3. What ONE THING will you share with a friend?
4. BONUS: What paths will you combine to boost your results?

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