



YOUR GUIDE TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Let's talk about a topic that many of us can relate to, especially in the times that we are in today: stress.

Stress is a normal psychological and physical response to the demands that life places on us. Too much stress can cause our “fight-or-flight” defense mechanism to come about. When under stress, our nervous system releases an abundance of stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. This results in our hearts beating faster, our blood pressure to rise, stiffening of our muscles and rapid breathing.

There are three different types of stressors that can inflict stress.

1. Physical stressors such as thirst, hunger, lack of sleep, and accidents.
2. Emotional stressors like worry, fear, grief, anger, and depression.
3. Social stressors that include family, friends, employers, teachers, and peers.

This cascade of events that occur throughout our body causes a lot of negative effects, especially when under chronic stress. Some of the effects that stress can lead to include anxiety; depression; digestive issues such as constipation, diarrhea, and acid reflux; headaches; heart disease; sleep problems such as insomnia; weight gain; memory and concentration impairment and many many more. As you can see, chronic distress can lead to a plethora of negative effects, so it is important to use stress management techniques to try and reduce our distress as much as possible.

Take a moment to think about how stress shows up for YOU and how you find yourself coping with it.

Here is a healthy stress management guide to help you the next time you find yourself under stress.

1. **Body relaxation exercises** such as breathing techniques and guided imagery are a great option to help relieve your stress.

2. Physical exercise such as yoga or any workout routine of your liking is one of the best and most productive ways to handle stress, as exercise releases stress-reducing chemicals in the body, known as endorphins.

3. Meditation is another great stress management technique that you can incorporate in your days. Some recommended apps that you can use as a resource are USC's Mindfulness App, Calm, and Omvana. Headspace is also a podcast that many enjoy listening to.

4. Counseling such as talk therapy or life coaching is helpful to many. If you are someone who likes to talk out your feelings, this will be a great resource for you. Check out the counseling resources at your disposal from USC here: <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>. If you are staff or faculty, contact The Center for Work and Family Life for counseling resources. <https://employees.usc.edu/work-family-life/>

5. Journaling and writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a good release for those built up emotions. Don't think about what to write, rather just write whatever comes to mind. No one is going to read it. This is just for you so don't worry about striving for perfection in grammar or spelling.

In addition to the resources listed above, here are some other stress relief strategies that might be helpful to you:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Get enough sleep
- Avoid unnecessary, distressful situations
- Tackle one thing at a time
- Think positively
- Accept what cannot be changed
- Find a way to relax your muscles/reduce tension (ex: stretching or taking a warm bath),
- Lastly, learn to say no!