



MANAGING STRESS

If you lead an active, involved life you can't expect to be completely free of stress. However, you can learn to keep stress from building up. If you are angry or upset, try to blow off steam physically by running, playing tennis, walking or mowing the yard.

Train yourself to relax. Stretching, deep breathing or regular exercise can reduce tension. When you relax you loosen up and are more at ease. When you feel tension building up, take a break.

Take charge of your life. When stress builds, postpone important decisions and resist new demands. Practice saying "no" when someone urges you to take on more than you can fit into your schedule. Refuse to do anything that violates your personal values.

Get enough sleep and rest. Lack of sleep can lessen your ability to deal with stress. Most people need at least seven to eight hours of sleep a day. If stress repeatedly prevents you from sleeping, inform your doctor.

Talk over problems with a friend, family member, teacher, or counselor. Sometimes simply talking about a situation can help you see things in a new way. If you can't seem to shake a feeling of anxiety or depression, seek help before problems become difficult.

Don't use alcohol or other drugs to calm down. These will add to your stress later on. Drugs may seem to offer a shortcut to communication and friendship, but they do not. By trying to duck life's struggles, users postpone the development of coping skills needed to manage normal stress and anxiety.

Try not to get upset about things you can't do anything about. If the problem is beyond your control, try your best to accept it until it can be changed.

Sometimes when you are distressed you focus too much on yourself and your situation. When this happens, it is often wise to do something

for someone else and get your mind off yourself. There is an extra bonus in this technique it helps you make friends.

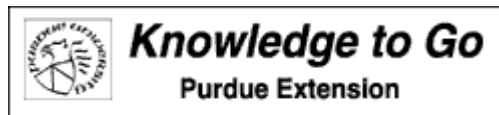
Make yourself available. Instead of withdrawing and feeling sorry for yourself, get involved in social activities. Later, take time to be alone. In one study, teens admitted spending more than a quarter of their waking hours by themselves. After returning to friends and family, they felt more cheerful, alert, and involved.

Schedule your time so you don't have too much to do. Make daily and weekly "To Do" lists. Crossing off items as you finish them gives you a sense of accomplishment. Plan to spend time on things that are most important.

Other ways to manage stress:

- **Avoid too many changes at once.**
- **Set reasonable goals for yourself.**
- **Ask for help when you need a hand.**

The way we deal with stress determines to a great extent the kind of lives we lead. Stressful situations can shatter us, or make us stronger. Although we cannot control everything that happens, we can influence more than we often think. Feeling helpless in the face of stress is the real enemy, not the stress itself.



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