The best physical activity is anything that you can enjoy and continue to do on a daily basis.

Rate your stress

We respond to stressors in one of two ways. Sometimes we respond to stressors with positive stress. Other times, we respond with negative stress. Positive stress, such as taking on a new challenge, can lead to physical or emotional problems. Negative stress, such as feeling overwhelmed by having too much to do, can lead to physical or emotional problems.

Many of us think of stress as pressure at work, not having enough money, or being sick. Whatever the case, these things aren't stress. They're actually the causes of stress, known as stressors. Any change in your life, no matter how large or small, can cause stress.

Understanding that you have control is key for managing stress. By improving your physical health and mental health, as well as your relationships, you can enjoy and continue to do so on a daily basis.

Develop coping skills

Coping skills can help you deal with day-to-day stress. Here are some things you can do to help relieve stress:

1. Be physically active

There is strong evidence that physical activity is one of the best ways to relieve stress. Recent studies show that physical activity can work as well as antidepressant medications. Walk, run, swim, hike, or do something you enjoy. Even if you feel you don’t have a lot of time, make it a priority. You’ll feel better in the long run.

Here are some ideas:

- Get away from your desk. Take a quick walk.
- Meet a friend for a “workout break” instead of lunch.
- Go for a bike ride after dinner.
- Learn something new, like yoga or tai chi.
- Enjoy activities with your friends and family, such as playing basketball or mini-golf.
- Try some activities you enjoyed as a kid—jumping rope, inline skating, or swimming.

2. Practice imagery or visualization

This is like taking a mini-vacation without leaving your chair. Think about a time and place that you found pleasant and relaxing. When you think of this place, try to remember details, like the temperature, sounds, and smells. If you can revisit your “place,” you’ll find yourself relaxing and feeling in control.

3. Change the way you think

Try deep breathing

This is a great way to feel less stressed. While sitting or lying down, close your eyes and relax your body. Breathe slowly and deeply. Letting your body breathe in and out, will help you stop the negative thoughts.

1. Write down everything that makes you feel negative stress. Common signs of negative stress include feeling overwhelmed, tense, irritable, irritable, or angry.

2. Decide which things on this list you can change and how you’re going to change them. Looking at your problems in an organized way helps to reduce your stress. An organized approach may include defining the problem, thinking about options, picturing a solution, and creating an action plan.

For example:

- If you’re always rushed in the morning and get to work feeling stressed, try getting up 10 minutes earlier. Take your time getting ready so you get to work feeling relaxed and productive.
- If you’re stressed because you’re too busy, allow yourself to say “no” to some of your obligations.

3. Realize that some things are out of your control and can’t be changed.

Try deep breathing

This is like taking a mini-vacation without leaving your chair. Think about a time and place that you found pleasant and relaxing.

Practice imagery or visualization

The best physical activity is anything that

you can enjoy and continue to do on a daily basis.
Getting your life in balance

You can create balance in your life that will help you deal with stressful events. By developing coping skills and taking care of yourself, you can start to handle feelings of stress in a more positive way.

Ask yourself if the ways you’re dealing with stress are working. Things like eating too much or watching TV for long periods of time might make you feel better at first. But these things really don’t get rid of stress.

Habits you’ve had for a long time can be hard to change. The following ideas can help:

Promote your own mental health

The following skills can help.

- Learn to think in a positive way.
- Try to view life’s challenges as opportunities.
- Spend time thinking about your own personal values, goals, and choices.
- Look for things that will give you a positive self-image.
- Find ways to express feelings positively and directly. When you’re unhappy with someone, write a letter that you don’t actually send. This can be helpful if you feel you can’t be honest with the person.
- Keep a personal journal.

Nurture your body

Take care of yourself. Get plenty of rest, eat healthy food, and do some physical activity each day. Don’t try to take on too much when you’re feeling down. Do things for others, but don’t over extend yourself.

Pay attention to these basics can reduce the amount of stress you feel.

Add pleasure to your life

Each day, try to do something fun, pleasurable, and relaxing that you look forward to. It doesn’t need to be expensive. It could be a bubble bath, a movie, a hug, working on a hobby, or anything that makes you feel good.

Social connection

Connecting with others is important for your well-being.
- Stay in touch with your family and friends.
- Volunteer in the community.
- Play with pets (yours or your neighbor’s.)
- Do something nice for someone.

Set goals

Set goals for yourself. Be sure to set goals that you can meet, measure, and feel good about achieving.

All of these activities will help keep your stress in perspective.

Counseling

Even if you practice these skills, there may be times when you feel overwhelmed. It’s common for people to abuse substances, such as tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, when things get especially challenging. It’s important that you don’t turn to these things when you need help coping. Trained counselors are available to help you through these hard times. If you feel that you need help, call Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services toll-free at 1-888-287-2680.

Additional resources

The Kaiser Permanente Resource Line can give you information on a wide range of health topics. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. toll-free 1-800-992-2279.

Visit the Kaiser Permanente website at kp.org/wa and find more information in the Health and Wellness Resources section.

If your stress is more than you can manage on your own, call your health care provider or Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services toll-free at 1-888-287-2680.

This information is not meant to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical care.