

## 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, also known as **stressors**. Any change in your life, no matter how large or small, can cause **stress**. **Stress** is how you react to these changes, physically and emotionally.

Since **stress is not what happens to you, but how you respond to what happens to you**, it is possible for you to control your stress.

**Understanding that you have control is key for managing stress.** By improving how you control stress, you can improve your physical health and mental health, as well as your relationships.

There are 3 things you can do to help put stress in perspective:

### 1. Write down everything that makes you feel negative stress.

Common signs of negative stress include feeling overwhelmed, tense, irritable, sleepless, 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 under control. Or, if you're feeling 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.

Find ways to help you cope with these stressors.

*For example:* If you're a caregiver, you may not be able to change that responsibility. Find ways to reduce your stress, such as hiring someone to come in once a week so you have time for yourself.

## 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 your response to a challenging project at work, can keep you energized and lead to a sense of accomplishment. Negative stress, such as feeling overwhelmed by having too much to do, can lead to physical or emotional problems.

## 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:

### 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 just do something you enjoy that will get you moving. 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 miniature golf.
- Try some activities you enjoyed as a kid—jumping rope, inline skating, or swimming.

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

### 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.

### Change the way you think

This is not as hard as it sounds. The key is to know when you can't change something.

Try to accept that some things are stressful. It's important to think in a positive way and accept what you can't change.

*For example:* If you hate cold and rainy days, accept the fact that you can't turn them into sunny days. Look for ways to enjoy them more. For example, treat yourself to lunch when it's cold and rainy out - this will give you something to look forward to.

Another way to change the way you think is to spend less time thinking thoughts that aren't helpful or productive. If thinking isn't leading to something productive, do something positive that will help you stop the negative thoughts.

### Try deep breathing

This is a great way to feel less stressed and it can be done just about anywhere. While sitting or lying down, close your eyes and relax the muscles in your face, neck, and shoulders. Breathe in slowly and deeply, pushing your stomach out as you breathe in. Say the word "relax" in your head as you slowly breathe out, letting your stomach come back in. Repeat this 10 times. You should feel calm and ready to face the world again!

## 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.

### 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 1-888-287-2680.

### 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.

Paying 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.**

## 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.

## Skills for managing everyday stress

- Rate your stress
- Develop coping skills
- Getting your life in balance
- Counseling

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

