

What Is Stress Management?



Now more than ever, stress can feel like an ever life.

Whether you work in an office or factory, or manage a household and watch after wildly energetic kids, you face a host of stressful situations. Particular stressors can affect some groups disproportionately. And the ongoing pandemic. COVID-19, its economic impact, and the social isolation of lockdowns took a toll on mental health.

Let's talk about some of the sources of stress – and what we can do to manage stress.

But first, a basic question you may be asking:

Is stress really a problem?

In a word, yes. Especially if your “stressed out” feeling remains constant, or chronic. Chronic stress can harm your mental health. It can weaken your immune system and cause uncomfortable physical symptoms.

But particular stressors, such as discrimination, can affect some groups more than others. Making members of these communities may not feel as though they can afford to manage stress, lacking the privilege of disposable income that others may be able to devote to de-stressing.

It's also worth making another observation about what causes stress, whether that cause is universal. All too often, stress results from factors out of our control.

That brings us to a recent cause of stress, for everyone.

The Pandemic's Ongoing Impact

No question, COVID-19 had a devastating impact, on many fronts. But one of the lagging effects is the pandemic's profound impact on the nation's mental health.

Even before the pandemic, Americans were already among the most stressed populations in the world. The isolation of lockdowns preyed on the minds of many.

In recent studies, Americans have reported higher levels of loneliness, burnout, depression, and anxiety during the pandemic. In 2020 and beyond, too many have turned to unhealthy ways to cope with stress, including binge-watching screens nonstop, drinking to excess or substance abuse.

Why should we try to manage stress?

Chronic stress is bad for you. Period. Full stop.

So it stands to reason that lowering your stress will lower your risk for the harmful physical and mental health effects.

Besides, your mind deserves better than to be loaded down with the never-ending job of worrying. Chronic stress can sap your creativity, productivity and motivation. You want to manage stress so you can live your best life.

Keys to Stress Management

The first step is awareness. Step "away from yourself" for a moment and consider objectively: Is my stress real? What is it, exactly, that is causing me to be stressed?

This process alone may help. Once you identify your stressors, you can ask yourself, "Is this a fair reaction? Sometimes, that acknowledgement – this is something I cannot control – will give you a helpful (and realistic) perspective. It may not be worth fretting over something you can't change.

That's not to say that you can't take steps to manage stress. In fact, here's a handy list of stress-management techniques.

See if some of these don't help to lower your stress level:

- **Move more.** Exercise is a great antidote to stress.