

EAP Newsletter – December 2024

How to Beat Serious Stress

Every day we face stressful events. Most of these events are minor. But other events are clearly major sources of stress. These include things such as a separation or divorce, or trouble at home or work.

You may need help from others, such as a professional counselor, to get a handle on a stressful situation. They can help you plan and implement changes to ease your stress. You also need to look at the resources available to help you understand and work through the problem.

When you're faced with a highly stressful event in your life, these methods may help you cope:

- **Don't make unneeded changes in your life.** Instead, save what energy you have for dealing with the major stressor at hand. If possible, try to make your work and home environments stable while working out the main problem.
- **Quiet your mind.** Use deep breathing and visualization methods to calm your mind and slow your breathing. When you're stressed, your mind can make things seem worse. It does this by creating endless versions of coming disaster. This affects your body, too. The body can't tell the difference between what's real and what's not. So, it reacts with a greater physical response.
- **Stay in the present.** You can calm both your mind and your body by keeping your mind in the present. The present is hardly ever as stressful as an imagined future or a past full of regrets. To stay in the present, center your attention on your breathing, a sound or visual pattern, a repetitive movement, or meditation.



- **Bravely and aggressively face the stressor.** Don't just ignore whatever is causing you stress. Instead, carefully think about the seriousness of the problem. But don't blow it out of proportion. Ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that is realistically likely to happen?" Then remind yourself of all the good things that will still be a part of your life even if the worst happens. Talk with others to confirm your view of the stressor. Make a special effort to speak to family, friends, or co-workers who have had similar experiences.
- **Review your coping responses. Confidence** is helpful in fighting stress. And it builds on memories of past successes. Think about successes you've had with other stressful life events. Recall some of the things you did to cope. Think about writing this down.
- **Take action.** Commit to a reasonable way to deal with what is causing you stress. Action is powerful in helping you to reduce stress. Studies show that your body lowers the amount of a powerful stress hormone (epinephrine) when you shift into action. Don't stop taking action because you're afraid you'll make the wrong decision. There are many ways to successfully handle a stressful situation.
- **Take time out to relax.** At least once or twice a day, take time to calm down by relaxing. Try listening to soothing music, taking a walk, gardening, reading, or exercising. You could also choose to do more formal relaxation, such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or tai chi.
- **Be mindful of your time.** Consider making a day-to-day prioritized list of what you need to do and cross off items as you complete them. This can help give you a sense of achievement and decrease a sense of being overwhelmed.
- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep can cause additional physical and emotional problems, such as drowsiness, memory problems, and trouble concentrating.

Stay away from alcohol and drugs. Far from helping you cope, these can actually make symptoms worse. If you're struggling with alcohol or drug use, consider talking to a parent, friend, professional counselor, healthcare provider, or a faith leader. Support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), can also be helpful. Treatment can be located through the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment Alliance \(SAMHSA\)](#)

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The Power of Laughter

One aspect of self-care that is often overlooked is laughter. The average adult laughs 17 times a day while a child laughs 300 times a day. Though you are probably focused on completing your obligations each day, that doesn't mean you can't find time for humor and lightheartedness. As E. E. Cummings said, "The most wasted of all days is one without laughter." Here are some of the benefits of seeking out laughter and how to go about incorporating it into your day.

Benefits of Laughter

Embrace the moments of levity in your life. Finding humor and laughter in stressful situations can provide a sense of perspective and turn an overwhelming moment into a manageable challenge. Laughing can reduce stress and improve your mood, giving you more emotional space to handle difficult experiences. Additionally, it's good for your physical health by helping to enhance your immune system and relieve pain.

Seek Out Joy and Laughter

Think about the times you laughed until you cried. Who were you with? Spend more time with them. After interactions with people, ask yourself, "Do I feel better or worse?" Life is too short to be with people who bring you down. Having a good sense of humor will also make others want to be around you.

If you know you're going to experience a particularly difficult period in your life, bolster your emotional defenses by planning a calendar of events or activities with the people who you enjoy being around. A positive mood is infectious, and gathering fun, lighthearted people around you during tough times can make the experience easier to work through.

Other Sources of Humor

Social media can potentially be a time waster and cause feelings of negativity. However, you can curate your feed so that it brings you a steady stream of positivity and humor. Follow accounts that make you laugh or bring light to your day. Alternatively, unfollow accounts that tend to make you feel down.

You could listen to comedy podcasts during your commute to school or work or while running errands. There are also numerous comedy specials, shows, and movies on streaming platforms. Ask your friends and classmates for recommendations and remember the shows you enjoyed to share with others who might need a good laugh to turn around a particularly tough day.