

Reducing the intensity of stress

Everyone experiences increased levels of stress from time to time. However, if left unaddressed, stress can continue to build and affect your health and ability to cope with life. This process can occur with chronic stress that builds gradually over time or with acute stress that suddenly overwhelms our ability to cope.

Each of us reacts to and deals with stress differently. Events like political unrest, natural disasters and community violence will create a variety of responses – for you, your family members and co-workers. Strong emotions like fear, sadness or other symptoms of depression are common as long as they are temporary.

Symptoms of stress

Common reactions to a stressful event include:

- Disbelief and shock
- Tension and irritability
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Difficulty making decisions
- Being numb to one's feelings
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Loss of appetite
- Nightmares and recurring thoughts about the event
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Sadness and other symptoms of depression
- Feeling powerless
- Crying
- Sleep problems
- Headaches, back pains and stomach problems
- Trouble concentrating
- Anger

Techniques to reduce stress now

It's important to remember that you can reduce the intensity of stress. Listed below are some techniques to try:

- Keep breathing. Take some slow, deep breaths and relax your muscles.
- Take a walk, go exercise and get out for a run. Physical activity can alleviate some of the tension in your body.
- Know your limitations. Avoid taking on extra responsibility if you can.
- Find ways to disconnect, such as reading a book, listening to some music or taking a long bath.
- Start a "Stress Journal" of your thoughts and feelings. Writing them out can help you process difficult emotions and see ways to better deal with them.

- Pick and choose your battles. Some arguments are not worth having and can create more tension. Spend your time and energy on something that will be more constructive.
- Whenever possible, focus on the positives. Looking at the good in your life is an important reminder that the current situation is only temporary.
- Use your support system. Friends and family can be great support systems to use when stressed.

Tips for self-care

You should also adopt healthy self-care activities during stressful times, such as the recommendations below:

- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** They may seem to be a temporary fix to feel better, but in the long run they can create more problems and add to your stress – instead of taking it away.
- **Find support.** Seek help from a partner, family member, friend, counselor, doctor, or clergy person. Having a sympathetic, listening ear and sharing about your problems and stress really can lighten the burden.
- **Connect socially.** After a stressful event, it is easy to isolate yourself. Make sure that you are spending time with loved ones. Consider planning fun activities with your partner, children, or friends.
- Take care of yourself.
 - Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet
 - Exercise regularly
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Give yourself a break if you feel stressed out—for example, treat yourself to a therapeutic massage
 - Maintain a regular routine
- **Stay active.** Give yourself a mental break by helping a neighbor, volunteering in the community, or taking the dog on a long walk. These can be positive ways to channel your energy and feel more positive.

When stressful feelings being chronic, counseling can help. A mental health professional can provide support and guidance to build your emotional resiliency as well as make changes in your life to reduce or eliminate stress. Your SupportLinc EAP offers in-the-moment support, guidance and expert referrals by calling 1-888-881-(LINC) 5462. Assistance is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention