

Managing Stress

Stress is the body's reaction to pressure or threat.

We all suffer from stress in one way or another and a certain amount of it can actually motivate us to act. When it becomes long-standing and overwhelming it can have harmful consequences.

The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion

Thich Nhat Hanh

In our modern lives we experience stress at various levels, individually and collectively. Aside from the stresses of daily life: finances, work, family, relationships, we are bombarded with unsettling news that point to uncertainty and fear. These stressful situations trigger our survival instinct which produces a cascade of physiological and psychological change.

Research has shown that stress can cause long-term physical

and psychological effects. Over time, repeated activation of the stress response can contribute to poor health because stress affects all systems of the body including the musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal, nervous, and reproductive systems.

The good news is that how we perceive stress and what we do about it can change our context, reducing or eliminating the negative impact of stress. In other words, our mindset plays a key role in how we see, react and handle stress.

Notice it



Notice your thoughts, sensations and emotions when you are faced with stressful situations. You will be able to identify your signs of stress with attention, intention and presence.

Name it



Name your sensations and emotions. Is your heart beating faster? Is your breathing labored? Are you scared? Are you angry? By naming your stress signs you can begin to process them.

Tame it



Take a deep breath in and slowly exhale. Continue naming and breathing as your body slowly calms itself and you feel your body self-regulating,



Managing Stress - Practice

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

During the stress response -also known as the fight-or-flight response- caused by stressful situations, aside from an array of other physical and emotional symptoms, our muscles tense. If we suffer from chronic stress, this muscle tension prolongs the stress response causing numerous adverse reactions. The Progressive Muscle Relaxation technique teaches us to become aware of this tension so we can better identify and manage stress:

1. Find a quiet, comfortable location.
2. Sit or lie down, whichever feels more comfortable to you.
3. Curl your toes into your foot. Notice how it feels when your foot is tense.
4. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
5. Release the tension from your toes by relaxing them. Notice how your toes feel after releasing the tension.
6. Tense your calf muscles.
7. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
8. Notice how it feels when your leg muscles are tense.
9. Release the tension and notice the feeling of relaxation and the difference from the feeling of tension.
10. Repeat this pattern of tensing and releasing tension throughout your feet and legs and then move up to your torso, arms, hands, neck and head.

1. Can you recognize your stressors? If so, can you name them.

2. What are your thoughts, emotions and sensations when you feel stressed? Can you name them?

3. Practice the Progressive Muscular Relaxation Technique. How do you feel during the exercise?

4. If you felt discomfort during the exercise. Describe it. Can you overcome this discomfort? How?

5. If your experience was positive. Can you identify and name your feelings and emotions?
