



Stress Management

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Medical science continues to explore the relationship between stress and health. Some short-term stress can be beneficial, such as when it motivates you to accomplish a task. Yet chronic stress can weaken your immune system. It is essential, therefore, that you learn to *manage* stress.

And, it's especially important that you *do all that you can* to manage stress during your own medical crises, medical treatments, and/or when serving as a caregiver to others. Below are tips that can help you effectively manage stress during such scenarios.

Recognize the source. Identifying the source of your stress and your reactions to it can help you learn ways to better manage stress when it occurs. To better understand your stress, keep a stress awareness diary and chart stressful events, including the date, time, and symptoms that occurred during the stressful event.

Be open. Good communication with your medical team can help reduce stress. During your appointments, speak openly about your symptoms and share your concerns. Set realistic goals and develop a plan for achieving them.

Prioritize tasks. To make tasks easier to handle, break large ones into smaller ones and prioritize them in order of importance. It may help to plan and tackle one task at a time. Try to save your energy for activities that are most important to you. Prioritizing tasks and keeping things simple can help to keep stress levels low.

Accept help. If you are in the middle of medical treatments, even small tasks can seem overwhelming. Determine what you need assistance with, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry, and child care. Be specific, and let someone else coordinate the help that you can get from others.

Make time for hobbies and interests. Take some time for yourself each day (very important for both patients *and* caregivers). Even if it's just for a few minutes, doing something that you enjoy can help reduce stress. Go for a walk, watch a movie, read a book, get a massage, take a warm bath, or call a friend. Creative outlets can also reduce stress. Try activities like drawing, painting, writing, or music.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity can be a great stress reliever. Even light exercises and gentle stretching can help relieve muscle tension and stress. Choose activities you enjoy, such as walking, swimming, gardening, dancing, etc. A physical therapist can help develop a safe exercise plan for your needs and abilities.

Eat right. A healthy, well-balanced diet can give you more energy to deal with daily stressors. Eat frequent, small meals throughout the day - and stay hydrated. Avoid stimulants such as sugar, alcohol and caffeine. A dietitian can develop a personal meal plan and can also recommend helpful supplements.

Know your limits. Trying to take on too much will only add to your stress. Listen to your body and balance activity with rest. Make sure you get plenty of sleep so you have energy to deal with stress when it occurs. Also, learn to set limits appropriately and say no to requests that make you feel overwhelmed.

Confide in others. Confiding in others can help you develop coping skills for dealing with stress. Share your concerns with family and friends. Join a support group. You may also want to seek private counseling. Ask your doctor for a referral to a pastoral counselor, psychologist, or social worker, etc.

*This information is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical guidance.
Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider prior to making decisions about your medical care.*