

Election 2020: Politics, Media and Stress

In recent polling, about two-thirds of Americans (66 percent) said they felt worn out by the amount of news during this election cycle. Another recent poll showed that more than half of U.S. adults felt the elections were “somewhat” or “very significant” sources of stress. Put those factors together with the ongoing pandemic and you end up with a serious threat to the nation’s mental health.

As the November elections approach, this might be a good time to assess your stress levels and take some precautions to protect your mental and physical health. There are many options for limiting media consumption, lowering stress levels and avoiding conflict during what is expected to be an unusually hard-fought election. Keep these tips in mind:

Staying Engaged and Stress Free

Not all of us can cut media and politics out of our lives altogether, especially when it seems to be a part of just about every conversation and displayed on every corner in the form of banners, billboards and yard signs. But there are ways to still engage in politics while keeping your stress levels in check.

Avoid Addictive Behavior

For many people, the first thing they do in the morning and the last thing they do before bed is to watch the news or scroll social media. The question is, how does this make you feel? For most people, the answer is anxious, irritated and even irate. Now consider how this affects your mental and emotional health. If political content is raising your blood pressure and heart rate while provoking an irritable mood, you can be sure it’s having an effect on your well-being.

Instead of just turning on the TV or opening Facebook throughout the day, schedule time during your day to catch up on the day’s events and then log off. Limit your viewing to fact-based media and avoid commentary, which can be more about emotions than useful information. Combined, these tactics should help keep your emotions, and your blood pressure, in check.

Steer Clear of Public Commentary

Given the emotionally charged nature of this election, it might be best to avoid political discussions when out in public or with people you don’t know well. Even seemingly innocuous comments can sometimes provoke others whose political positions differ from yours. The last thing you need to deal with is an angry outburst in a public setting. Even among friends with whom you share a political affiliation, keep the politics to a minimum. After all, they may be trying to limit their political exposure.

Be Open to Opposing Views

Some political conversations, such as with extended family during meals or on Facebook, are impossible to avoid. If you find yourself in such a situation, use the opportunity to learn about opposite points of view. If you aren’t clear on a point someone is making, ask specific questions to clarify. Then give the person a chance to answer without interruption. You may learn something.

Keep in mind, however, that if the conversation becomes heated or uncomfortable in any other way, you are under no obligation to continue taking part in it. Try to change the subject, or excuse yourself from the table. Take the time away to calm yourself. Once you return, you may have better luck changing the topic.



Stay on Top of Your Stress

You don't have to divorce yourself completely from politics and media during the election. Just be mindful that if you are going to engage in the process, it's likely that your stress is going to rise. So take proactive steps to manage your stress:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Get 7-9 hours of sleep a night
- Exercise a least 30 minutes a day
- Meditate or practice deep breathing techniques
- Stay socially connected with friends and family
- Get outdoors when you can

Setting Digital Limits

More than a quarter of all Americans report being on social media on their smartphones nearly constantly during the day. In the current political climate, that can be especially unhealthy. If you're looking to cut back on your social media and smartphone use, keep these tips in mind.

Be aware. Pay attention to your surroundings and how you feel when you're on your smartphone. Did you sneak away from a date or are you hiding in the bathroom stall at work to scan your Facebook or Twitter account? You may need to cut back.

Moderation. Create a routine by spending only a fixed amount of time online for personal use during your day. Avoid logging on first thing in the morning and especially at night, when media usage can disrupt healthy sleep patterns.

Set rules. Forcing yourself into a complete digital detox may be an impossibility, but try to set clear rules about when you won't have your smartphone in your hands or near you, such as when the kids come home for school, during mealtimes or when you go to sleep.

Get help. Decreasing your attachment to smartphones can be a challenge, so tell family and friends what you're trying to accomplish and ask for their support. If your smartphone addiction is negatively impacting your physical, mental or social health, you might consider seeking help from a therapist or support group.

Grab a book. Many people seem to have forgotten that they can still obtain information without using the Internet. Put your smartphone away and spend a few hours at the library or bookstore and see how it feels to flip through the pages of a book or magazine.

Pause before you post. Before you hit send, stop and reflect on what you're going to share on social media. Avoid unverified news, private information and confrontational or inappropriate remarks. Concentrate on thoughtful and encouraging posts and on engaging in meaningful conversations with like-minded people.

There's an app for that. If you're struggling to turn off your smartphone, there are apps that can shut them down for you at pre-determined times.





Resilience in Stressful Times

Regardless of which side of the political aisle you occupy, this election season has been a stressful one. Keep in mind that stress doesn't always get better on its own. You may have to actively work on it, especially if the stress you have been facing is prolonged or intense. The following stress management techniques may help:

Scale back. While it may seem easier said than done, take a close look at your daily, weekly and monthly schedule and find meetings, activities, dinners or chores that you can cut back on or delegate to someone else. If news reports or social media posts are contributing to your stress, try turning off the TV and the Internet until you feel better able to deal.

Prepare. If you are feeling edgy already, try to stay ahead of additional stress by preparing for meetings or trips, scheduling your time better, and setting realistic goals for tasks both big and small. Stress mounts when you run short on time, so build a cushion into your schedule for traffic jams or slow public transportation, for example.

Reach out. Make or renew connections with others. Surrounding yourself with supportive family, friends, co-workers, or clergy and spiritual leaders can have a positive effect on your mental well-being and your ability to cope. Volunteer in your community.

Take up a hobby. It may seem cliché, but an enjoyable pastime can calm your racing mind and heart rate. Try

reading, gardening, crafts, tinkering with electronics, fishing, carpentry or music—things that you don't get competitive or more stressed out about.

Relax. Physical activity, meditation, yoga, massage and other relaxation techniques can help you manage stress. It doesn't matter which technique you choose. What matters is refocusing your attention to something calming and increasing awareness of your body.

Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep affects your immune system and your judgment and makes you more likely to snap over minor irritations. Most people need seven to eight hours a day.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine. While momentarily calming, both can contribute to stress and anxiety.

Get professional help. If your stress management efforts aren't helpful enough, see your doctor or contact your Employee Assistance Program. Chronic, uncontrolled stress can lead to a variety of potentially serious health problems, including depression and pain.



Coping With Uncertainty

Uncertain times can leave us feeling anxious and stressed, and for many us, life feels particularly uncertain lately. Between the election, the pandemic and the recent spate of natural disasters, it's not surprising that many of us are feeling like we're on unstable ground.

Keep in mind that in life, no one can avoid the unexpected. But these simple steps from the American Psychological Association can help you better face life's uncertainties:

Be kind to yourself. Some people are better at dealing with uncertainties than others, so don't beat yourself up if your tolerance for unpredictability is lower than others'. Remind yourself that it might take time for the stressful situation to resolve, and be patient with yourself in the meantime.

Reflect on past successes. Chances are you've overcome stressful events in the past. Give yourself credit. Reflect on what you did during that event that was helpful and what you might like to do differently this time.

Develop new skills. When life is relatively calm, make a point to try things outside your comfort zone. From standing up to a difficult boss to trying a new sport, taking risks helps you develop confidence and skills that come in handy when life veers off course.

Limit exposure to news. When we're stressed about something, it can be hard to look away. But compulsively checking the news only keeps you wound up. Try to limit your check-ins and avoid the news during vulnerable times of day, such as right before bedtime.

Avoid dwelling on things you can't control. When uncertainty strikes, many people immediately imagine worst-case scenarios. Get out of the habit of ruminating on negative events.

Take your own advice. Ask yourself: If a friend came to me with this worry, what would I tell her? Imagining your situation from the outside can often provide perspective and fresh ideas.

Engage in self-care. Don't let stress derail your healthy routines. Make efforts to eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep. Many people find stress release in practices such as yoga and meditation.

Seek support from those you trust. Many people isolate themselves when they're stressed or worried. But social support is important, so reach out to family and friends.

Control what you can. Focus on the things that are within your control, even if they're as simple as weekly meal planning or laying out your clothes the night before a stressful day. Establish routines to give your days and weeks some comforting structure.

Ask for help. If you're having trouble managing stress and coping with uncertainty on your own, ask for help. Start by contacting your Employee Assistance Program.



What is resilience?

Of the many factors that go into coping with uncertainty, the most important may be resiliency. Resilience is the measure of our ability to welcome challenges, overcome adversity and get back on track to achieving our goals.

Resilience is more than coping; it's about confronting crises and difficult situations without getting overwhelmed by them. Resilient people are better able to handle life's stressors and to adapt to changing situations. Being resilient can help protect you from depression, stress and anxiety, too.

- Some of the characteristics of resilient people include:
- Strong relationships
- Self-motivation
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem solving
- Self-awareness
- Emotional control

There will always be periods of relative stability and times when everything seems up in the air. While times of upheaval can be stressful, there are things you can do to cope with this challenging environment:

Find a healthy balance. Your work is important, but it's unhealthy for you mentally, physically and socially if you live, breathe and sleep your job. Get off the rollercoaster and away from the stress and uncertainty by surrounding yourself with friends and family and finding positive outlets to spend your free time.

Be positive. There is only so much you can control. How you feel about your situation is one of those things. Look for the silver lining and practice positive self-affirmations—it can change your mood and outlook on life.

Look for the gray. Even though it may seem so, not everything is black and white or gain and loss. Search for the middle ground. It can be a far less stressful place.

How to Manage Anger and Stress

When facing change, it's fairly common to feel anger and stress. It's important, however, to remember that allowing such emotions to run you leads to mental, physical and social consequences. If anger is getting the best of you, there are a number of steps you can take to manage it in a healthier way:

Relax and calm down. Take deep breaths. Count to 10 and let the tension escape from your body. Try relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga and progressive muscle relaxation.

Remove yourself from the environment. If a person or situation is causing you to feel extremely angry, or if you feel that you cannot talk about your emotions or express your anger positively, walk away.

Identify the source. What exactly is making you angry? When you recognize the cause, approach it in a positive, productive way.

Think before taking action. Carefully consider the consequences of your response. Will you regret saying what is on your mind? Is there a better way to express your anger than the first impulse that



came to you? Do not overreact. Avoid making assumptions or guesses; know the facts before you speak out about someone or something.

Assert yourself appropriately. If you feel strongly about something, do not hold back from saying what is on your mind. Let the other person know what you want. Be clear and direct in your message.

Divert your attention. If there is nothing you can do to change the situation, (e.g., you are stuck in a terrible traffic jam that is making you increasingly irritated), think of something else. Focus on a pleasant thought, an upcoming vacation or a happy memory.

Find humor in the situation. When appropriate, learn to laugh at life and conflicts with others. Break the tension and defuse the situation with a smile, a joke or a funny (but not sarcastic) comment.

Be patient. Try to be tolerant and empathetic of others. Attempt to understand their situations and behaviors.

Find a substitute outlet for anger. Instead of acting on an aggressive urge, find a creative outlet for your energy. Start an exercise program. Take up a physically challenging new sport like kickboxing. Try a new hobby or artistic endeavor such as painting.

Get advice from others. If you simply do not know how to deal with an angry feeling or situation, ask friends or family for suggestions on how they got through similar situations.

There are also a number of ways you can alleviate stress in your day-to-day life. Here are 10:

Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.

Schedule a realistic day. If you can't avoid back-to-back appointments, try to at least give yourself a few moments for a breathing spell.

Do not rely on your memory. Write down appointment times, assignment due dates, etc. As an old Chinese proverb states, "The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory."

Be prepared to wait. A paperback, crossword puzzle or cell phone game can make a wait in a post-office line almost pleasant.

Procrastination is stressful. Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.

Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass does not get mowed this weekend or if the sheets have to be changed on Sunday instead of Saturday.

Learn to say 'no.' Saying no to extra projects, social events and activities you do not have the time or energy for takes practice.

Eliminate destructive self-talk. "I can't ..." or "I'm too inexperienced to ..." are negative thoughts that can increase stress levels.

Take time for yourself. Develop a belief that everyone needs quiet time every day to relax and be alone.

Turn off your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect.



Understanding Criticism and Cyber Bullying

All of us have been criticized at some point in our lives. It is important to understand why people criticize others and to recognize the difference between positive criticism, which is vital to our intellectual and emotional growth, and destructive criticism, which is not.

Why do people criticize others?

There are many reasons for criticizing others. A manager, for instance, must pass along feedback, positive and negative, in order for an employee to meet job expectations. Teachers must show students what they did incorrectly in order for them to learn. At times, however, criticism isn't an effort to improve one's knowledge or promote emotional growth but to cause emotional or psychological pain. The following are some reasons people engage in such behavior.

Feelings of inferiority. They are trying to make themselves feel more secure by belittling others.

Personal failure. They criticize others as a way to think that the problem is with others, not themselves.

Group acceptance. To feel part of a group, they strengthen ties within the group by criticizing people who do not belong in the group.

Revenge. They feel slighted due to some previous situation, and they use criticism as a form of humiliation or punishment.

Ego. They feel they deserve better and other people are preventing them from achieving their goals.

Types of Criticism

Criticism can be constructive or destructive. Constructive criticism is intended to provide useful feedback to help the recipient improve. It is healthy and, in many situations, necessary for us to grow personally and professionally. Destructive criticism, on the other hand, is invalid and often delivered in a manner meant to belittle or hurt the recipient.

The negative effects that destructive criticism can have on people is well documented. In a recent study, undergraduates were subjected to either constructive criticism or destructive criticism. Those who received destructive criticism reported greater anger and tension and indicated that they would be more likely to handle future disagreements with the critic through resistance or avoidance and less likely to handle disagreements through collaboration or compromise.

In a similar study, undergraduates who received destructive criticism of their work were found to have set lower goals and reported lower self-efficacy on two additional tasks than subjects who received constructive criticism or no feedback at all.

There are two simple tests to determine whether criticism is destructive:

It uses unreasonable qualifiers. Any statement containing words such as "you always" or "you never" is generally meant to be a destructive criticism. Honest criticism is tempered and uses words such as "sometimes" or "recently."



It's personal. Being called “boring” by someone who didn't like the article or post you uploaded is an example of destructive criticism.

Handling Destructive Criticism

Unfortunately, we are all subject to destructive criticism. This is especially true in the digital age when people communicating anonymously feel few of the social constraints that normally temper our interactions. The following are some suggestions for dealing with destructive criticism.

Disagree. One technique for dealing with destructive criticism is simply to disagree with it. In the face of destructive criticism our tendency is to become passive and upset or to become aggressive and fight back. Neither is a good solution. Disagreeing, however, is not the same as dismissing. By dismissing, you ignore the possibility that there may be some validity to the feedback. A better option is to filter the information and, if there is some validity to it, find a way to agree with a small part of what is being stated.

Respond to words, not tone. Separate any criticism from the way it is said or written. When offering criticism, people may come across as confrontational or aggressive. By staying calm and refusing to be provoked, criticism can be separated from the style of criticism, helping you to learn from any information that may be useful.

Pause before responding. A pause allows you to reflect on the message and to respond appropriately, especially when the message is meant to provoke you. If you feel that you may cry or lash out, remove yourself from the situation, whether it's a face-to-face interaction or online. In the instance that you can't remove yourself, stay calm and do not be provoked to react. Try to emotionally remove yourself and listen objectively to what is being said. This will help you gauge whether the critic is being fair and objective.

Thanks but no thanks. This can be a powerful tool when dealing with someone who is in regular contact with you. When receiving destructive criticism, be polite, thank them, but let them know that similar feedback is not beneficial or not welcome in the future. For instance, if someone tells you that your presentation “was poorly delivered,” thank them but ask them to be more specific about how the delivery can be improved.

Learn about them. Often personal or overly harsh criticism has more to do with the critic's personal life than with your actions. Perhaps they're dealing with personal issues, or they may criticize others as a defense mechanism for covering up their own feelings of inadequacy. They could even be trying to undermine your self-confidence in an effort to boost their own. It could be many different reasons, and it can be worth your time to consider the motivation.

Seek perspective. Whether with a trusted colleague, friend or family member, a third party might be able to look at the situation more objectively than you. They're likely to ask questions that can help you think about the situation in a different way. Perspective can help you remove any emotion from the situation and make it easier to respond more effectively.

How to Deal with Haters

A “Hater” is someone who uses negative and critical comments and/or behavior to bring another person down by making them look or feel bad. These hurtful and negative comments can be delivered in person, online or in texts and apps. Often the comments and behavior are repeated over time.



Haters are often anonymous (especially online). Hateful, critical behavior is another form of bullying or cyber bullying. Like bullying, hater behavior is something that a person does – it is not who they are, and it can be changed.

Often, haters pick on people whom they perceive as being different from themselves. Being the focus of negative and critical comments can be upsetting and trigger feelings of anger, hurt and confusion, and can cause the person being criticized to question their self-worth and behavior. If the negative comments are posted online, it can also make someone afraid to use their social media accounts or feel ashamed.

Ignore it and do not react or respond to negative comments. However, if someone threatens you physically, report it immediately to the authorities.

Be kind and respectful even to haters. It shows that you're in control of your emotions and that you are not letting negativity upset you.

Stick with supporters. Having a friend nearby if you think you might encounter a hater means you'll have positive reinforcements, if needed.

Remind yourself that comments from a hater are a reflection of them and are not about you. People who feel good about themselves don't need to put others down.

Understand criticism can be a sign of emotional pain. People sometimes lash out because they are struggling with their own issues. Negative comments may have nothing to do with you.

Acknowledge your feelings. Talk to a friend for support.

What is cyber bullying?

Cyber bullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices (e.g., cell phones, computers and tablets). Cyber bullying can occur through SMS, Text, apps, online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can participate, view or share content. Cyber bullying includes sending, posting or sharing negative, harmful, false or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyber bullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

The most common places where cyber bullying occurs are:

- Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter
- Text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices
- Instant messaging, direct messaging, and online chatting over the internet
- Online forums, chat rooms, and message boards, such as Reddit
- Email
- Online gaming communities

With the prevalence of social media and digital forums, comments, photos, posts, and content shared by individuals can often be viewed by strangers. The content an individual shares online creates a permanent public record of their views, activities and behavior. This public record can be thought of as an online reputation, which may be accessible to schools, employers, colleges, clubs, and others who may be researching an individual now



or in the future. Cyber bullying can harm the online reputations of everyone involved – not just the person being bullied, but those doing the bullying or participating in it.

Cyber bullying has unique concerns in that it can be:

Persistent. Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for those experiencing cyber bullying to find relief.

Permanent. Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment and other areas of life.

Hard to notice. Because others may not recognize that cyber bullying is taking place, it is hard to notice.

Report Cyber Bullying

When cyber bullying happens, it is important to document and report the behavior.

Steps to Take Immediately

- Don't respond to and don't forward cyber bullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyber bullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyber bullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails and text messages. Use it to report cyber bullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- Block the person who is cyber bullying.

Report Cyber Bullying to Online Service Providers

Cyber bullying often violates the terms of service established by social media sites and internet service providers.

- Review their terms and conditions or rights and responsibilities sections. These describe content that is or is not appropriate.
- Visit social media safety centers to learn how to block users and change settings to control who can contact you.
- Report cyber bullying to the social media site so they can take action against users abusing the terms of service.

Report Cyber Bullying to Law Enforcement

When cyber bullying involves the following activities it is considered a crime and should be reported to law enforcement:

- Threats of violence
- Child pornography, sending sexually explicit messages or photos
- Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes

Some states consider other forms of cyber bullying criminal. Consult your state's laws and law enforcement for additional guidance.



Relieving Stress and Anxiety

Sometimes, your emotions can trigger physical responses and urges in your body. For example, if you are nervous, you may feel your hands start to shake or sweat. Instead of focusing on getting rid of your anxiety and the physical responses that accompany it, try accepting them as they arise.

How Stress Affects the Body

Emotional stress often causes tension or discomfort in the forehead, temples, neck, throat, jaw, shoulders, chest or abdomen. Most people feel one (or a combination) of these symptoms when they are stressed, while others experience numbness. At times, attempting to ignore or push these feelings away can worsen the discomfort. Instead of thinking about sweaty palms, shaking hands, stiff shoulders, a tight throat, or a quick heart rate as weaknesses, think of them as natural responses to your feelings.

Developing Mindfulness

When you are experiencing pain or discomfort, take a minute to focus on it and ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I feel uncomfortable?
- What does it feel like?
- Does it have a certain shape?
- Does it move or stay in one place?

Breathe deeply and acknowledge your discomfort and its characteristics. Accept how you are feeling and take ten slow, deep breaths. Recognize that the emotional discomfort you are experiencing is fleeting and that your body is simply responding to stress. Imagine your discomfort expanding and contracting as you breathe. As you go about the rest of your day, allow yourself the space to feel uncomfortable. Learning to accept your emotional discomfort as you are experiencing it will ease some of the anxiety and tension associated with the physical symptoms of stress.

It is important to remember that being uncomfortable is not a weakness. Just as laughter is a response to humor, discomfort is a response to stress. Both laughter and discomfort are natural responses to emotions.

Keep in mind that it is natural for physical symptoms of stress to come and go. Knowing that feelings of discomfort are temporary responses to stress will allow you to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

Maintaining Calm

Lowering and controlling stress and anxiety levels takes regular practice. Keep in mind the following tips to help you:

- **Talk about your feelings.** A good way to alleviate fear is to discuss it. Chat with a friend or family member, or take advantage of the help available through your Employee Assistance Program.
- **Focus on what is important.** Playing with your children, for example, is a more productive than watching all the news coverage of the world's woes. Focus your energy on what is important to you.
- **Decide what you can and cannot control.** While it is smart to be aware of your surroundings and what is going on, dwelling on events out of your control can be detrimental.
- **Reduce your stress.** Incorporate basic stress-reducing activities into your life, including exercise and leisure activities such as watching a movie or reading a book.



- **Carry on with your daily life.** Disruptions caused by excessive worry will only increase stress levels for yourself and those around you. Adhere to your routine as much as possible.
- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** Physical health plays a key role in keeping your mental health stable.
- **Seek professional help.** If you are suffering from sleep or eating disruptions, talk with a professional. Start with your Employee Assistance Program, which can provide short-term counseling and refer you to resources for more intensive treatment.

Resilience-building Techniques

Stress takes a physical toll on the body. It causes fatigue, tension, nervousness and loss of appetite. The key to avoiding these tolls and keeping stress in check is resilience, which can be strengthened by improving self-esteem, developing a strong system of social support and taking care of your physical and mental health. Here's how:

Maintain Strong Connections With Family and Friends. Having strong, positive relationships with others provides a cushion of acceptance and support that can help you weather tough times.

Avoid Viewing Problems as Insurmountable. You have probably handled and survived difficult situations in the past. Learn from these past experiences and be confident that you will get through the current crisis, too.

Accept That Change Is Part of Living. The reality is that certain things cannot be controlled. What's important is how you respond to the situation. Accepting the change makes it easier to move forward with your life.

Keep a Long-term Perspective and Hopeful Outlook. Even though your feelings may be overwhelming at times, try to stay positive. Set goals for yourself so that you can feel productive and purposeful every day, and create longer-term goals so that you have a direction for your future.

Take Care of Your Physical and Mental Health. It's especially important when you are feeling stressed to continue to eat a healthy diet and get adequate sleep and regular exercise. Alcohol and caffeine can increase stress levels; avoid or reduce their consumption.

Get Support and Resources from Your Employee Assistance Program. If you need help dealing with a personal crisis, or would like additional resources and strategies for improving your resilience, contact your Employee Assistance Program for confidential counseling and other services.





Creating a Self-care Plan

To feel your best, it is important to take care of yourself, especially when your job demands so much from you emotionally. Maintaining emotional resilience requires eating well, exercising, keeping work and home life balanced and maintaining good relationships. But there are times when even these things can't prevent stress and anxiety from creeping in. That's why self-care is so important. Taking a small amount of time out of your busy schedule just for yourself is key to handling all your duties while getting the most out of life. Try these tips to give yourself the attention you need to be your best.

Deep Breathing. Deep breathing focuses on using the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) to draw slow, deep breaths into the lungs and to release them slowly. Take a couple of minutes every hour to practice some deep breathing.

Stretching. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times a day can have positive effects.

Meditation and Visualization. Meditation involves "quieting the mind" by blocking out sensory input and distraction, while visualization involves using the brain's creative capacity to create a stress-free experience, much like daydreaming. Try to carve out 15 minutes daily to quiet your mind and body.

Muscle Relaxation. Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques involve systematically tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. It is best to practice these techniques when you have about 20 minutes and are able to find a quiet place where you can lie down without being disturbed.

Calming Thoughts. Our thought patterns often cause or contribute to the stress that we are feeling. The next time you encounter a stressful situation, take a moment to tune into your thoughts and feelings. Write these thoughts down and then write down a more positive replacement.



Relaxation Tips for Better Sleep

Everyone has trouble falling asleep from time to time. Establishing a bedtime routine, avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening, and turning off the TV and smartphone can help prevent sleep issues. But on those nights when you just can't fall asleep, there are some other techniques that can help quiet mind and body and ease you into slumber. Try the following techniques:

Deep Breathing

Breathing from our chests or shoulders can create more tension and stress by preventing air from reaching the bottom of our lungs. Deep breathing focuses on using the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) to draw slow, deep breaths of air into the lungs and to release them slowly.

Stretching and Yoga

Stress often appears as tension in our necks, shoulders and head, what's commonly referred to as the stress triangle. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Yoga is a more formal method of stretching, but even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times can have positive effects.

Massage

Physically, massage can help alleviate tense muscles, lower blood pressure, promote deep breathing and improve posture. Mental benefits of massage include reduced anxiety, increased body awareness and enhanced creativity.

Meditation and Visualization

Meditation involves "quieting the mind" by blocking out sensory input and distraction, while visualization involves using the brain's creative capacity to create a stress-free experience, much like daydreaming. Both meditation and visualization can be helpful in relieving stress.

Additional Tips for Good Sleep:

- Get up about the same time every day and maintain a regular schedule.
- Go to bed only when tired. If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing.
- Establish pre-sleep rituals, such as a warm bath, a light bedtime snack or 10 minutes of reading.
- Do not go to bed on an empty or too-full stomach.
- Exercise regularly at least six hours before bedtime.
- Do not eat or drink anything containing caffeine within six hours of bedtime.
- Do not drink alcohol within several hours of bedtime.
- Avoid smoking close to bedtime.
- Keep the room where you sleep cool (around 68 degrees).
- Minimize noise with earplugs and sound-absorbing bedroom decorations such as drapes and carpets.

