



How to Cope with Stress

1. Get **Active** – exercise daily even if it’s just a brisk walk around the block. Moving our bodies helps to activate our brain and provides an opportunity for indirect processing. Give yourself a break from stress by engaging in physical activity!
2. Get good **sleep** – it’s tough to cope if your basic needs are not getting met and sleep is one of those basic needs! Practice good sleep hygiene (see worksheet). Most healthy adults need at least 7 hours of good, uninterrupted sleep, but many people need up to 9 hours. Keep in mind that substance-induced sleep is not good sleep.
3. Improve your **eating** habits – talking about basic needs, here is another one. Eating healthy, nutritious meals is vital to our coping abilities. Fast food, fats, sugars, etc. all place strain on the body in various ways thus reducing our resiliency and tolerance for stress. If you find yourself eating in your car and chronically at the drive-thru, it’s time to slow things down, re-evaluate your habits, and make some changes to better support your diet. Fruits and vegetables, baby!
4. Practice **mindfulness** – we are all in a hurry. There are a million things to be done and never enough hours in the day. While it sounds contradictory, you will be more effective and efficient if instead of multi-tasking, you focus on doing one thing at a time and giving it your undivided attention. We call this mindfulness and there is another handout about it if you’d like to know more!
5. Practice active **relaxation techniques** – our stress levels can increase without our even noticing so it’s a good habit to periodically practice a relaxation exercise. Try deep breathing (5-7 minutes), complete a body scan, progressive muscle relaxation, etc. Even a stress ball or other sensory item can help interrupt the stress accumulation process and help you regulate.
6. **Play** – ensure you take time each day for something fun. Our brains and bodies REQUIRE periods of levity and recreation. If you can, try something new each day. The only rule is that it’s an activity that doesn’t cause any harm to you or anyone else. If you have difficulty thinking of ideas, reference the pleasurable activities worksheet.
7. **Talk** it through – without looking for advice or solutions, talk through your stressors with someone safe. Just voicing our problems helps with processing and stress relief. Even better if you have someone in your life who can be nonjudgmental, objective, and supportive.
8. **Write** it down – start a stress/anxiety journal and track the things and situations that seem to exacerbate your stress levels. Again, this is a form of processing and purging. It is also an excellent tool to begin looking for patterns and begin problem-solving those issues which are intolerable to you.
9. Develop a **mantra** – Mine is “it is what it is.” It reminds me that even though something may feel intolerable and overwhelming, feelings are not facts and they will pass or the situation will be resolved. Think of an inspirational or meaningful phrase that you can focus on to redirect tension from a problematic internal experience to something more tolerable and constrained. “Be brave,” “One day at a time,” “Calm, cool, and collected,” and “This too shall pass,” are some good examples.
10. **Say “no”** and set effective boundaries – you are one person and you have limits. This is a fact. Practice setting boundaries and protecting those limits so as to have enough time for self-care and relaxation. Saying no is a powerful and important skill. You cannot help others unless you are in a good place yourself. So even if you are externally focused, try to shift that focus regularly onto yourself so that you can stay in a good place.
11. **Never give up** – no matter how hard or stressful things are right now, the one thing guaranteed is that they will change. Everything does. It will get better. It will get worse. And your job is to hang on throughout the ride and just do the best you can to be the best you can.