

10 Steps to Manage Your Stress

Cutting back on the stress in your life may help you feel better, eat better and stick to an exercise plan, all of which can lower your risk for heart disease. But if you're too stressed to figure out how to get started, here are a few tips:

1. Eat and drink sensibly. Abusing alcohol and food may seem to reduce stress, but actually adds to it.
2. Assert yourself. You do not have to meet others' expectations or demands. It's OK to say "no." Remember, being assertive allows you to stand up for your rights and beliefs while respecting those of others.
3. Stop smoking or other bad habits. Aside from the obvious health risks of cigarettes, nicotine acts as a stimulant and brings on more stress symptoms. Give yourself the gift of dropping unhealthy habits.
4. Exercise regularly. Choose non-competitive exercise and set reasonable goals. Aerobic exercise has been shown to release endorphins (natural substances that help you feel better and maintain a positive attitude.)
5. Relax every day. Study and practice relaxation techniques. Choose from a variety of different techniques. Combine opposites — a time for deep relaxation and a time for aerobic exercise is a sure way to protect your body from the effects of stress.
6. Take responsibility. Control what you can and leave behind what you cannot control.
7. Reduce causes of stress. Many people find life is filled with too many demands and too little time. For the most part, these demands are ones we have chosen. Effective time-management skills involve asking for help when appropriate, setting priorities, pacing yourself and taking time out for yourself.
8. Examine your values and live by them. The more your actions reflect your beliefs, the better you will feel, no matter how busy your life is.
9. Set realistic goals and expectations. It's OK, and healthy, to realize you cannot be 100 percent successful at everything at once.
10. Sell yourself to yourself. When you are feeling overwhelmed, remind yourself of what you do well. Have a healthy sense of self-esteem.