

## **New Strategies to Effectively Manage Stress**

### **Find the Strategy That Works Best for You and Practice**

There are many strategies to reduce stress, but some will work better than others for each individual. The important thing is to have an open mind and give each strategy a chance – even try them more than once – in order to find your optimal strategy to relieve stress. Once you do find a strategy that resonates with you, practice. Strategies to manage stress are like muscles – with continued practice, you will become stronger.

### **The Mind-Body Connection: Knowing Is Half the Battle**

How we think influences how we feel – and vice versa. The more self-aware you become, the sooner you'll be able to take action when you do become stressed. It is important to note stress can be both harmful and helpful. On one hand, stress can be harmful because it can lead us to feeling overwhelmed and run down. On the other hand, a healthy amount of stress can motivate us to take action and improve our situation. At the end of the day, experiencing some stress is normal, but whether we benefit from it or not can depend on our stress management techniques.

### **Cognitive Reappraisal**

Cognitive reappraisal is changing how we think about stress. Studies show that if we are feeling stress and we perceive it to be harmful, then it actually will have harmful effects. However, if we have a positive mindset regarding our stress and believe that it doesn't have to be harmful, it can have beneficial effects. By positively reflecting on stress, even though cortisol (stress hormone) levels stay the same, DHEA (a growth hormone), which protects against the negative effects of cortisol, increases.

### **Framing**

So you may ask, *“How do I change my views of stress?”* Try framing – or turning a negative statement into a positive one. For instance, instead of saying *“I don't want to hand in my draft to my advisor, it stinks and isn't good enough,”* say *“I'm going to get feedback on my draft, which is a work in progress.”* Framing may feel unnatural at first, however, this is a good example of “fake it 'til you make it.” With enough practice, it will become a habit and soon you won't even realize you're doing it.

## **Celebrate Your Accomplishments**

Humans have a negativity bias, meaning that we are inherently hard on ourselves and pessimistic when it comes to our own abilities or when interpreting situations. We often don't take the time to recognize our accomplishments, however, doing so can reduce negative effects of stress over time. By focusing on our accomplishments, even in the presence of stress, we gain practice in balancing multiple perspectives – a mental skill shown to help us cope with stress, in addition to being a skill important in everyday life.

## **Show Others You Care**

Often we think of being there for others as an additional stressor in life. We always hear “first take care of yourself before helping others.” However, taking care of others can be a way of helping yourself. One study found that helping other people decreased the stress perceived from running out of time on something. It induces feelings of competency because you are useful and helpful to others than you would be by only focusing on yourself. There are simple ways to do this. For instance, reach out to people you care about to ask them how they are doing on a regular basis. When intentionally using this technique as a tool to reduce stress, be proactive with clear and specific goals (e.g., contact at least one person per day).

## **Do Things That Bring You Meaning**

Often times when we are stressed, we also feel pressured to not do things that bring us meaning (e.g., volunteering). However, research has found that adding things to your schedule – even when feeling like you don't have enough time as is – can reduce your feelings of stress when it is something that you find meaningful. Take the time to think about what you enjoy – volunteering, athletic activities, reading – and carve out time even in the busiest of schedules. Even though you will still have just as many (if not more) things to manage, you may start to feel like you have more control, which is directly linked to reduced feelings of stress and more productivity.

## **Strike a (Power) Pose**

Power posing is a physical stance or position that people mentally associate with being powerful; they tend to take up more space than regular postures. By power posing we communicate not only to others, but to ourselves as well. There are many different poses you could put yourself into; what matters is that this is a position that feels powerful to *you*. Power posing comes with a whole host of benefits including better productivity, higher confidence, better relaxation, and less perceived stress. In turn, the body will gain practice in healthier biophysiological responses and ultimately respond in healthier ways. Practice putting yourself into your power pose for two minutes per day – you can do this one alone.