

Got Stress?

*9 Easy and Effective Ideas for  
Negative Stress Relief*



A Lifestyle Approach

### Why a lifestyle approach?

Stress is something everyone has; yet everyone experiences it differently. By recognizing this, it makes sense to create an individualized, comprehensive lifestyle approach. Doing that ensures the strategies and information you use will address your unique, specific concerns. The following 9 ideas can easily be incorporated into any comprehensive lifestyle plan.

### What is stress?

Don't confuse "stress" with "stressors". Stressors are your unique sources of stress related to your mind working overtime or something challenging in your environment.

Stress itself is more of a psychological and physical experience and response to thoughts or situations you perceive as challenges. This means anything you perceive as a challenge, real or imagined, can activate your stress response. For example, constant worry, fears, your baby at the top of the stairs, smoke billowing out of your oven, or judging your abilities and coming up short, can all instantly activate your stress response. Notice some of these are real and some are imagined-that is one key to understanding your stress response.

### Can stress really be good for you?

Yes, it can. Stress isn't always bad for you. Just like having good cholesterol and bad cholesterol, there is good stress and bad stress. This can also be called eustress and distress, respectively. You are probably more familiar with bad or negative stress yet experiencing the good type motivates you to do your best and helps you prepare for life's enjoyable moments. Knowing which type you have can make a big difference in your outlook and the differential effects on your mind and body.

Bad or negative stress is the type of stress where you believe or recognize you don't have the resources (*e.g., money, time, skills*) to take care of a situation. When this happens and becomes chronic, you may begin to experience some of the harmful physical and mental, and spiritual effects mentioned later in the "Chronic Stress" chart.

Good or positive stress is the type where you believe or recognize the situation or thought challenges you somewhat but you believe you DO have the resources to take care of it. Since you believe you can handle things, you're less likely to experience the harmful physical, mental, and spiritual effects.

In addition to understanding the difference between positive stress and negative stress, it's helpful to also know about acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress can be both positive and negative whereas chronic stress is usually negative.

### Acute Stress Vs. Chronic Stress

#### Acute Stress

These are the daily hassles you occasionally experience. Since these are brief and have an end in sight, you generally don't experience severe negative physical or emotional symptoms. Use the checklist below to see if any of these apply to you.

Some Sources of Acute Stress	Some Symptoms of Acute Stress	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fender bender ( <i>no one hurt, only car</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/> Headache	<input type="checkbox"/> Fear
<input type="checkbox"/> Unexpected deadline at work	<input type="checkbox"/> Shallow breathing	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious
<input type="checkbox"/> Unplanned dental visit	<input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty hands	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritable
<input type="checkbox"/> Surprise birthday party	<input type="checkbox"/> Angry	<input type="checkbox"/> Cold hands
<input type="checkbox"/> Job interview	<input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension	<input type="checkbox"/> Frustration
<input type="checkbox"/> Disagreement with someone	<input type="checkbox"/> Rapid heart beat	<input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhea
<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic ticket	<input type="checkbox"/> Elevated b.p.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yelling
<input type="checkbox"/> Doing some wedding planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Neck ache	<input type="checkbox"/> Fast breathing

#### Chronic Stress

This occurs when your sources of stress are long term. Here you begin to see the harmful physical, psychological, and spiritual effects. Use the checklist below to see if any of these apply to you.

Some Sources of Chronic Stress	Some Symptoms of Chronic Stress	
<input type="checkbox"/> Overworking	<input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia	<input type="checkbox"/> No sex drive
<input type="checkbox"/> Under earning	<input type="checkbox"/> Heart disease	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety
<input type="checkbox"/> Bad relationship	<input type="checkbox"/> Overeating	<input type="checkbox"/> Hypertension
<input type="checkbox"/> Toxic office	<input type="checkbox"/> Often sick	<input type="checkbox"/> Depression
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional and/or physical abuse	<input type="checkbox"/> Skin problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Self criticism
<input type="checkbox"/> Bullying at work	<input type="checkbox"/> Constant worrying	<input type="checkbox"/> Drink a lot
<input type="checkbox"/> Being laid off	<input type="checkbox"/> Isolate self	<input type="checkbox"/> Bad judgment
<input type="checkbox"/> Family problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Early death
<input type="checkbox"/> Noisy neighborhood	<input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness	<input type="checkbox"/> Infertility

## 9 Easy and Effective Lifestyle Strategies

1. **Be mindful:** When you're mindful, you're being aware and truly in the moment-no future, no past-only the present moment exists. Critical to being mindful is to accept without judgment what is, including any thoughts, and simply remain attentive to the current situation. In essence, be aware, be curious, be nonjudgmental. **Quick idea:** Next time you eat, try to do it slowly, savoring every bite. Notice the different colors, smells, and the different flavors and textures of each mouthful. By doing this, you may find yourself eating less.
  
2. **Get enough sleep:** If you're tense, it's difficult to let go and get restorative sleep. Getting adequate sleep is critical to having a positive mood and thinking clearly, both of which allow you to make good decisions for your life. Sleep needs vary based on age and stage of life, but most adults benefit from 7~8 hours per night. **Quick idea:** Get some good exercise in several hours before bedtime. Then, instead of watching TV before bed, listen to some soft music, do some stretching, or spend some time focusing on your breathing. Make sure you put away all electronics. Sweet dreams.
  
3. **Eat healthy:** What you eat can affect your mood and how you think, which subsequently can affect your behavior. Poor or inadequate nutrition could be a major factor in experiencing stress symptoms. When you make health-promoting choices with your food, you can begin to regain control over your life. Be mindful of your relationship with food and choose wisely. **Quick idea:** Choose a new nutritious recipe to try at least once per month. Choose something you've wanted to try and make time to prepare it. Bon Appétit!
  
4. **Move your body:** Exercise has many physical and psychological benefits; counteracts the harmful stress hormones thus raising your stress threshold; keeps you mindful; enhances your immune system; helps regulate blood sugar; reduces obesity; and helps stave off depression and anxiety. Plus, you can focus better after exercising. **Quick idea:** Call your friend with the great sense of humor and take a long walk together. Walking with them instead of alone can help keep you mindful and make you laugh a lot. Time to get moving!!!

5. **Breathe deeply:** Practicing deep breathing can slow and even stop the stress response. When you do this, your adrenaline and cortisol (2 *stress hormones*) can levels decrease, your blood pressure and heart rate can go down, your muscles can relax, and your immune system can function better. **Quick idea:** Inhale through your nose to a gentle count of 4, 1-2-3-4 and exhale through your nose or mouth to a count of 4, 4-3-2-1. Practice this several times and notice how you feel. You can also put a favorite soothing word, like peace or calm, in the space between the inhale and exhale-i.e., 1-2-3-4-*Soothing Word*-4-3-2-1. Be mindful and monitor.

6. **Get regular massage:** Therapeutic massage offers many benefits such as relaxation and calming the nervous system. This directly reduces the levels of destructive stress hormones. Massage can also reduce tension and anxiety, which are two stress symptoms. Other great benefits include improving your mood, physical symptoms, and quality of life. Last, it is also effective for pain reduction and sleep disorders. **Quick idea:** Schedule a massage today. There are several options such as getting a massage membership at a reputable location or asking a friend to recommend someone. Enjoy!

7. **Social support:** There's a saying, "a trouble shared is a trouble halved". Letting others in allows you to feel cared about and helps you see you are not alone. Also, just knowing you have people who care about you and who want you to be happy, can help you feel better about your life and situation. Using your social network supports cardiovascular health, immune and brain functioning. **Quick idea:** Call a friend today and share your life with them and ask them to do the same.

8. **Say NO:** Set limits (*a.k.a. boundaries, both personal and professional*) and don't let others transgress them. Saying NO ensures you don't take on too many responsibilities, which could easily and quickly lead to overwhelm and burnout. Remember, it's okay to delegate and you are not responsible for everything. Today, practice saying, "No", and monitor how you feel; you may be surprised. **Quick idea:** Practice saying "No" to at least one request a day for the next week and see how you feel.

9. **Laughter:** A good belly laugh relaxes your muscles, gets more oxygen into your body, reduces blood pressure thus improving blood flow, and lowers cortisol and epinephrine levels (2 *stress hormones*) which makes your immune system function better. Find ways to have several good belly laughs every day. **Quick idea:** if you've had a stressful day, visit a local card shop and read the funny cards-it's free, it's fun. Or call up your favorite friend or relative who's great at making you laugh; share your life with them and laugh all the way to relaxation and better health.

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