

Week 5 Challenge: Reduce Your Stress

Anything that acts as a challenge or a threat to our well-being is a stress. Stresses can be positive or negative. Stress is everywhere and can be a barrier to accomplishing goals. No matter when and why it occurs, stress can zap your energy, affect your mood, and make you feel unmotivated. Because stress can affect you mentally, emotionally and physically, it is especially important to learn how to manage your stress level for this Challenge. An additional benefit of knowing how to deal with stress is that you can use some of the distraction techniques you will learn to manage emotional eating.

This week you will learn about stress and its causes, practice activities to help you overcome stress, keep a stress journal, and score your stress level. Understanding stress and how to respond to it will help you in all areas of your life. Remember, stress is something you can work to manage and overcome!

Use These Resources to Complete Your Action Items:

- *Stress Management*
- *Activities for Relieving Stress*
- *Emotional Eating*
- *Depression*
- *Keeping a Journal*
- *Stress Management Resources*
- *My Stress Diary*
- *Stress Score Scale*

Your Action Items This Week

- Start using the stress management tips given this week.
- Begin a journal and write in it each day.
- Find out your stress level by using the Stress Score worksheet (page 19 in workbook).
- Keep track of stress you experience using the My Stress Diary worksheet (page 20 in workbook).
- Review Emotional Eating Diary worksheet (page 21 in workbook).
- See if your Employee Assistance Program at work offers stress management resources.

Use the Week 5 Challenge Tracker to track your progress.

Step up to the Challenge and say, "I Can!"

Stress Management

What are the Signs of Stress?

Physical symptoms: upset stomach, headache, fast heartbeat, being tired, constipation, trouble sleeping, diarrhea, backaches, and heartburn.



Mental symptoms: trouble paying attention to things, hard time making decisions, forgetfulness, making a lot of mistakes, repeating thoughts.

Behavioral symptoms: crying, sleeping more or less than normal, arguing often, loss of appetite or overeating, drug or alcohol use.

Emotional symptoms: anger, irritability, being moody, depression, preoccupation-worrying and being anxious, and forgetfulness.

What are the Causes of Stress?

Stress is most often caused by changes or problems in the following areas:

- Work
- Home and family
- Health (ex: sickness, flu, etc.)
- Personal and social life
- Worries about money
- Injury
- Surgery
- Relationships



Tips for Taking Charge of Stress

Control: Focus only on the things you can control. Be patient. Be sure what you expect is reasonable and take steps to solve the problem.

Time Management: Prioritize your activities. Decide what you really need to do in your life. Learn to say “No.”

Support: Seek support, help, fun, and love from family, friends, faith groups or service agencies. (Other examples: behavioral health counselors, financial counselor)



Personal Health: Practice positive health habits. Be active. Eat healthy food and get enough sleep.

Balance and Connection: Find meaning in your life. Spend time with family, friends, yourself, work, church and volunteer groups.

Direct Action: Think about ways to solve a problem. Pick the one you like best and do it.

Adapt: Life requires that we be flexible, able to deal with change and adjust to new ideas and ways of doing things.

Self Esteem: Talk yourself out of negative thoughts. Be your own coach and believe in yourself.

Positive Outlook: Choose to view your world with hope. Look for the good in every situation.



Assertiveness: Learn to speak for yourself about your feelings and needs.

Compassion: Try putting yourself in the other person's shoes. Forgive, forget and move forward.

Activities for Relieving Stress

1. **Breathe** – You can do this anytime, anywhere! Stop what you are doing and practice breathing exercises. Inhale slowly through your nose as you expand your abdomen. Exhale slowly through your mouth as you let your body relax. Deep breathing releases hormones that are beneficial to the body and promote health and a sense of feeling centered and in control.

2. **Meditate** – Many Americans have reported benefits of meditation that range from relief of chronic pain to the relief of depression. Sit quietly, close your eyes, and relax your body. Many books and tapes are available to guide you through meditations. Visit your local library to find some. Also, you can check the Internet to find free meditation radio stations or podcasts. For example “Mediation Oasis,” which you can find on iTunes, is very good.



3. **Guided Imagery/Visualizations** – This relaxation technique involves picturing yourself in a peaceful and relaxing environment – almost like daydreaming! Think of something you like to do, a special holiday, or a place you’d like to visit – and go there in your mind. Take in every little detail. This technique allows you to use your own thoughts and create a place of relaxation special to you.

It can also help you achieve goals. Practice in your mind. Imagine yourself taking a walk, doing the exercise or planning a meal. Books and tapes may also be available from the library to teach you how to use this technique.

4. **Self-Hypnosis** – Using self-hypnosis to get into a deeply relaxed state can fight tension, trigger your relaxation response, and help to prevent health problems due to chronic stress. It can also be used to help you achieve healthy lifestyle changes that can reduce the amount of stress you have in your life.



5. **Exercise** - Get moving! Increasing your heart rate causes your body to release endorphins (en-dör-fens), which are chemicals that make you feel good. People who exercise frequently experience less stress than those who do not.
6. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** – Sit or lie down in a quiet place, and tense and then relax each of your muscle groups. By tensing

and relaxing all the muscle groups in your body, you can relieve tension and feel much more relaxed in minutes. No special training or equipment is needed.

7. **Sex** - Many people have less sex when under stress when, in fact, sex relieves tension.

8. **Music** - When dealing with stress, the right music can actually lower your blood pressure, relax your body, and calm your mind.



9. **Yoga** – A combination of various stress management techniques including breathing, meditation, imagery, and movement. Yoga can improve memory, circulation, and lower blood pressure and heart rate. Your local library may have books, tapes or DVD's on yoga.



10. **Adequate Sleep** – Most people average only 6-7 hours of sleep a night when adults should be getting no less than 7.5 hours each night. Adolescents need more, up to 10, in some cases. Poor sleep affects your mood, memory, and your ability to be alert and make good decisions.

11. **Eating a Balanced Diet** – Maintaining a healthy diet can help you to better manage your stress. Add more vegetables, fruits, vitamins, water, and complex carbohydrates such as vegetables, beans, peas, and whole grains to your diet.

12. **Regular Contact With a Support Network** – One way to deal with stress is to have a good social support system. Sharing your feelings and problems can help you relax and make your problems easier to understand. A good support network can also distract you from stressful situations and help you find solutions to stressful problems.

Emotional Eating

Sometimes the strongest cravings for food happen when you're at your weakest point emotionally. You may turn to food for comfort when you're facing a difficult problem, feeling stressed or just bored. Emotional eating is when you eat to suppress or soothe negative emotions and can harm your weight-loss efforts.



Recognizing the triggers that cause you to eat emotionally will help you stop emotional eating. Before you eat, ask yourself if you are really hungry or if you are eating for another reason. If you are not hungry, resist the temptation to eat and try to deal with the root of your stress or boredom.

We've provided an Emotional Eating Food Diary in the workbook (page 21) as well. When you're facing a difficult problem, or feeling stressed use this to help you identify what is triggering the eating.

Depression



It is normal to feel “blue” or “down” every now and then. However, if these feelings last for more than 2 weeks, or have side effects that make even the small things hard to accomplish, you may be suffering from depression. Depression is the feeling of sadness, hopelessness, and disinterest in what is happening around you every day. Depression may begin after a stressful event in your life or because of chemical changes within your brain. Illness, such as diabetes and heart disease, can also trigger depression. When you have a chronic health condition, you may feel “different” from co-workers and family members or be feeling stressed just taking care of your condition.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

- Irritable or cranky
- Frequent crying
- Sleep problems: sleeping too much, trouble falling asleep, not being able to stay asleep
- Anxiety or panic feelings worsen
- Decrease in sexual desire
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Concentrating or remembering things is difficult
- Loss of appetite or can't stop eating
- No energy although sometimes you may feel overexcited
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- No longer interested in hobbies or daily activities
- General aches and pains, and headaches increase



Getting Help and Treatment Options

If you have some of these symptoms, talk to your care team. There are physical causes such as poorly controlled health conditions that can cause these symptoms too. Thyroid problems and medication side effects can also cause many of these symptoms.

- Do NOT stop any medications without speaking with your care team **FIRST**.
- You may be referred to a specialist. This is NOT a sign of weakness.

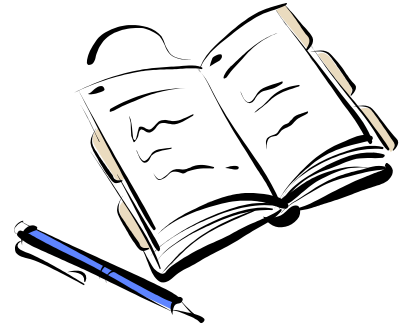
Other treatment options include:

- Professional counseling
- Aerobic exercise, such as running or swimming
- Proactive positive self-talk
- Scheduling activities throughout the day
- Vitamin B6, folic acid or niacin supplements
- Medication

Keeping a Journal

Keeping a journal can be a good way to learn more about your thoughts and feelings. It's not always easy—it can be painful to write about bad feelings—but writing a journal is one of the best self-help methods you can use. To help you get started, here are some tips for keeping a journal.

- ✎ Instead of just writing about events and happenings, focus on your thoughts and feelings about those events.
- ✎ Write for yourself only. This forces you to be honest with yourself. (At some point, though, you may want to share the journal with someone. This could be a therapist, or a very trusted friend or family member who can give you feedback.)
- ✎ Set the stage for writing. Find a comfortable spot to sit, take a deep breath, and begin. Write for 20 minutes without stopping.
- ✎ Write every day, if possible. It may help to write at the same time every day, maybe after dinner or before bed.
- ✎ Remember that the way you write doesn't matter. You don't have to use complete sentences, correct punctuation, or any punctuation, for that matter.
- ✎ Buy a journal you'll enjoy using, perhaps with pictures or colored pages. Use colored pens or pencils if you like.
- ✎ If you really don't like to write, record your thoughts on a mini-cassette recorder.



Some tips to help you get your thoughts started...

“Today I feel...”

“One good thing that happened today was...”

“My goal for tomorrow is...”

Stress Management Resources

In addition to the stress diary and stress score scale in your workbook (pages 19 and 20), below are some resources for stress management. Please check out the, I Can! Challenge's online 'Resource Page' (www.ICanChallenge.com) for further resources to assist you.

Helpful Internet Sources on Stress

www.wellspan.org – WellSpan Health

www.nmha.org - National Mental Health Information Center

www.mentalhelp.org - Mental Health Help

www.wholeperson.com - Whole Person Associates



Helpful Books

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff and It's All Small Stuff by Richard Carlson, PhD.

Mental Health Services

Community Health Improvement, call 717-851-3222

WellSpan Behavioral Health, call:

717-851-6340 (East York)

717-339-2710 (Gettysburg)

717-845-6611 (West York)



Center for Mind/Body Health (717-851-5590)

Adams Hanover Counseling (717-632-4900)

Adult Mental Health Services (717-840-2389)

Memorial Behavioral Health (717-849-5744)

Hanover Hospital Wellness Connection (717-633-2248)