

Stress Management Techniques

It's not primarily the event of condition itself but our attitude to them, or response to them, that causes the stress reaction. We can learn to control our reaction to stress.

Stress reactions can be physical, such as muscle tension, headaches or insomnia. They can be emotional, such as depression, irritability or moodiness. They can be cognitive, such as memory lapses, negative thought patterns or difficulty concentrating. They can also be behavioral, such as increase in smoking, alcohol abuse, or avoidance of difficult situations.

Approaches to stress management can also be physical, emotional, cognitive or behavioral.



Physical Methods

Physical exercise of almost any kind helps clear the tension and stress hormones from our bodies. Examples include walking, shooting hoops, running, working out, gardening, or swimming.

Yoga or other stretching exercises are particularly effective in releasing tension from the muscles.

Bodywork such as massage therapy or acupuncture also helps to release tension from the muscles.

Guided relaxation exercises such as the one available from the Counseling and Advising Center release tension and teach the body to relax.



Emotional Methods

Talking about it, to a friend, relative or counselor can release tension and other stress reactions.

Sitting and allowing yourself to feel and accept the emotions can alleviate stress and tension. Crying can also serve as a form of release.

Cognitive Methods

Learn to **identify any distortions in your thinking patterns** that may contribute to your stress responses. As you notice these patterns, let them go and replace them with gentle, positive self-talk.

Learn to identify **beliefs that contribute to stress** and assess to what degree you hold each one. Begin recognizing them as beliefs that can be changed. This will loosen their hold on your thinking.



Behavioral Methods

Become aware of your breathing pattern. Do you breathe into your chest or belly? If your chest, **begin switching to belly breathing**, which tells your nervous system to relax.

When you begin to feel stressed, **take 5-10 deep breathes into the belly**, counting down.

Reduce or eliminate intake of caffeine if it charges you up.

Begin **eating regular nutritious meals** and **getting sufficient sleep**.

Take the How Vulnerable Are You to Stress inventory to identify other potential lifestyle changes that can reduce your vulnerability to stress.

Compiled by the Grays Harbor College Counseling and Advising Center