

# Stress CareKit®



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**Note:** This CareKit® does not replace expert medical care.

Use this CareKit® to help you:

- Learn about stress.
- Identify things that cause stress for you.
- Learn ways to reduce and manage stress.
- Practice stress management techniques.



## What is Stress?

Stress is the way you react to any change (good, bad, real, or even imagined). These are some of the body's responses to stress:

- Breathing speeds up.
- Blood pressure rises.
- Heart rate speeds up.
- Muscles tense.
- Sweating occurs.
- Pupils dilate.
- Abstract thinking goes down.



A certain amount of stress can make you more alert. It motivates you to take action. Stress also helps you respond to threats to your safety, such as being near a fire.

Too much stress or stress that lasts a long time causes distress. This can make you less able to accomplish tasks.



When left unchecked, distress can lead to health problems. These include:

- Heartburn.
- Back or neck pain.
- High blood pressure.
- Heart disease.
- A lowering of the body's immune system.



The American Academy of Family Physicians states that about two-thirds of all visits to family doctors are stress-related.

## What Causes Stress for You?

### Top Ten Stressful Life Events:

1. A partner's death.
2. Divorce.
3. Marriage separation.
4. Jail term.
5. Death of a close relative.
6. Injury or illness.
7. Marriage.
8. Fired from job.
9. Marriage reconciliation.
10. Retirement.

*Source: Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory*

### Top Ten Stressful Daily Events:

1. Too much to do; not enough time.
2. Undesirable living/working conditions.
3. Demands of work, family, friends, etc.
4. Traffic.
5. Conflicts/arguments with others.
6. Exams or meeting deadlines.
7. Illness or taking care of someone else.
8. Money issues.
9. Lack of job security.
10. Little control over decisions.



## 25 Ways to Manage Stress

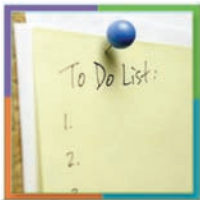
### Follow Good Health Habits:

1. Do regular exercise for both physical and mental health.
2. Do aerobic exercise at least 3 to 4 times a week for 30 or more minutes a time. This increases the circulation of oxygen and makes endorphins, the body's "feel good" chemicals.
3. Do mind-body exercises, such as Pilates, tai chi, and yoga.
4. Do strengthening exercises, such as lifting weights and using stretch bands.
5. Eat at regular times. Don't skip meals.
6. Choose healthy foods. Avoid "junk foods" — ones high in fat and sugar.
7. Limit caffeine.
8. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.
9. Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day.
10. Get enough sleep and rest.
11. Take medicines, vitamins, minerals, and herbal products, as advised by your doctor.



12. Sip a cup of warm herbal tea.

13. Make a  
“to do”  
list.  
Rank  
order  
daily  
tasks.



14. Listen to calming music.

15. Take a warm shower or bath.

16. View changes as positive  
challenges.

17. Talk out troubles with a  
friend.

18. Reduce clutter. Organize  
items at work and home.

19. Do something that makes you  
laugh.

20. Lessen  
exposure  
to  
stressors.

21. Have a  
good cry.

22. Help  
others.

23. Find a  
temporary diversion. Take a  
walk, read, etc.

24. Do a relaxation exercise.  
(See pages 14 to 19.)

25. Use a thought control technique.  
(See pages 20 to 21.)



## Prevent Burnout

Burnout is being emotionally exhausted and detached from others. It is a gradual process due to prolonged stress from work, school, relationships, etc. Use these tips to help prevent burnout:

- Set career and personal goals that can be achieved.
- Prioritize what you need to get done in a day, a week, etc.
- Delegate tasks at work and at home to lighten your load. Learn to say, “No.”
- Reduce long work or study hours, if you can.
- Take regular 5 to 10 minute relaxation breaks. Do relaxation exercises. (See pages 14 to 19.)
- Balance work and play. Plan time for hobbies and recreation. Plan one or more vacations during the year. Don't do work on your vacation.
- Focus on long-range goals, not just day-to-day problems.
- Discuss feelings and problems with family, friends, and coworkers to ease frustrations that feed burnout. If things don't get better, get help.

## Relaxation Exercises

### Deep Natural Breathing:

1. Sit in a chair, arms at your sides, legs uncrossed.
2. Note any tension in your muscles.
3. Put one hand on your chest; the other on your abdomen.
4. Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose. Let your abdomen expand, pushing up your hand. After your abdomen is full of air, let your chest expand pushing up your other hand. Do these with one long steady breath.

5. Hold the air in for 3 seconds.

6. Purse your lips. Exhale through your mouth making a relaxing, whooshing sound.



7. Keep taking long, slow, deep inhales through your nose and let out long, slow exhales through your mouth.
8. Focus on the sound and feeling of deep breathing. Continue for 3 to 5 minutes.

## Relaxation Response

1. Choose a quiet place that is free of distraction and limits outside noises. Ask for privacy.
2. Sit in a comfortable position so that there is no undue muscular tension. Your chin may naturally drop a bit as you choose to relax. Your feet should touch the floor. Do not lie down. You may fall asleep.
3. Close your eyes gently, not squeezed shut. Expect a very relaxing experience.

4. Begin to repeat a one-syllable word, like “one.” Say this word silently over and over again for 15 minutes. Repeat the word slowly or quickly.

5. Let it just happen. If distracting thoughts occur, ignore them. Simply return to repeating the word



“one.” These other thoughts are supposed to occur. Let them go. Doing this releases stress.

## Deep Muscle Relaxation

1. Sit in a chair. Close your eyes. Rest your forearms on the sides of the chair, palms downward.
2. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Focus on the muscle tension you feel, but do nothing about it.
3. Tighten a body part for 5 seconds. Then let the tension dissolve for 30 seconds. Follow this sequence:
  - Press your back against the chair. Relax.
  - Tighten your abdomen. Relax.
  - Lift and extend your lower legs. Relax.
  - Tighten your jaw. Relax.
  - Close your eyes. Relax.
  - Tuck your chin against your chest. Relax.
4. Keep breathing slowly and deeply.
5. Focus on the overall feeling of relaxation. Let your head and shoulders drop forward and your body go limp.
6. Imagine feeling energizing warmth throughout your body.
7. Slowly open your eyes. Note how refreshed you feel.

**Note:** Don't hold your breath during the tensing phase. Don't tighten any region of the body that's weak or injured.

## Thought Control Techniques


### Thought Stopping:

1. Close your eyes. Isolate and briefly focus on the stressful thought.
2. Count to three.
3. Shout “Stop!” (If others can hear you, picture a stop sign, or the word, “Stop” in bold letters.)
4. If the thought still occurs, repeat steps 1 to 3.
5. Resume your normal activity, feeling better.



### Thought Zapper:

This technique uses a mild physical punishment to get rid of unwanted thoughts.

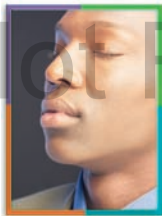
1. Place the elastic  band that came with your Stress CareKit® (or a rubber band) around your wrist.
2. Snap it every time you have a negative, self-defeating thought.
3. State the phrase, “I choose to be in control.”
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3, as needed.

Use the Thought Zapper with Thought Stopping (see page 20).

## Stress Rehearsal

Rehearse in your mind for future stressful events.

1. Write or state what you want to happen. State it in the present tense.
2. Close your eyes. For 1 to 2 minutes, focus on feeling relaxed.
3. Create a picture of the event in detail (what you see, feel, smell, hear, and touch).
4. Focus again on feeling calm.



5. Picture the results you desire.
6. Pair positive emotions, like joy, pride, etc. with your created, desired image.

Practice this exercise 2 times a day for 5 minutes each time. The best times are when you first wake up and when you're ready to go to sleep at night.

### **Purifying Sighing Exercise:**

1. Keep your shoulders erect.
2. Let out a big sigh, making a sound of relief as the air leaves your mouth.
3. Continue to sigh 10 to 15 times in a row.

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