



## Tips for managing stress

From the anticipation of beginning a new year to adjusting to whatever else life throws at you, this time of year can be an especially stressful time for many people. Here are seven ways to guard yourself against and alleviate potential stressors. These strategies can be used year-round.

### 1. **Be realistic – and optimistic**

You are one person with 24 hours in a day. Avoid putting pressure on yourself to be perfect. Instead, make goals about doing the best you can.

Also, look for reasons to be positive. Inviting yourself to take pride in your personal and professional accomplishments, however small, can go a long way towards helping you feel energised and motivated.

### 2. **Set boundaries**

Resist the pressure or urge to make yourself available at all hours. Trying to fit too much into one day can make you less effective and eventually lead to exhaustion. Do what you can to organise your time and tasks, so you're focusing on the highest priorities first and foremost. For example, divide errands or chores into 'must-do's', 'should-do's' and 'no-need-to's' where possible.

### 3. **Take time for yourself**

Make sure that you take time for yourself – even if it's just a few minutes or an hour or two. Also, give yourself permission to decline requests for extra shifts or social invitations. Giving yourself downtime to recharge can ultimately help you be more positive and productive overall.

#### 4. **Limit distractions**

Aim to limit distractions. For example, if feasible for your work day, schedule regular times to answer emails in groups, instead of answering them individually as they hit your inbox. If your work requires concentration, block time off in your calendar and signal to colleagues not to disturb you – perhaps by signing off from messaging apps or putting on headphones.

#### 5. **Take a break**

Relaxation is the natural countermeasure for stress, so do your best to take breaks to help you refresh and recharge. Even short breaks help improve your mood, performance and well-being. Also, schedule activities that you enjoy. When it comes to taking a break, it doesn't matter 'what' you do, so much as 'that' you do take the opportunity to rejuvenate.

If you do feel intensely stressed, consider using relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga or whatever else helps slow your breathing and heart rate to bring you back to equilibrium.

#### 6. **Take care of your health**

Even when your schedule heats up, make time for regular exercise, getting enough sleep and eating nutritious foods. All of these can help you be more resilient to stress and feel better overall.

#### 7. **Reach out**

Having a solid support system among co-workers and loved ones can help you ultimately be less stressed and more productive. In a moment of high stress, just having someone to talk to who will listen to what you're going through can help you calm down or cool off and reset.

Plus, maintaining positive friendships generally correlates to mental health and happiness. That's because healthy friendships can help keep your spirits up, give you a sense of connection and improve your self-confidence, among other benefits.

### **Bonus! Take time to laugh**

Laughing is fun and feels good. It also offers short- and long-term health benefits, including boosting your immune system by releasing chemicals in your body that help to fight stress.

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# Stress-busting tip: Moderate your media exposure

With all that's going on in the world socially, politically and otherwise, people often find themselves scrolling through streams of distressing breaking news reports and the opinionated social media posts that tag along. Plus, as people do surf, it's often difficult to know what's true. Just about anyone, anywhere, with any motivation can add to the online conversation. Over time, taking in and trying to process all of it can contribute to stress, anxiety and depression.

To help protect your mental health and well-being, a first step is to set boundaries to limit your exposure, such as only allocating a certain and preferably short amount of time to scan the headlines and feeds, and blocking disturbing sites and people from posting in your feeds.

Another important step is to be mindful of how media messages can influence your thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and arm yourself with media literacy skills to focus your attention on credible sources.

Here are some tips for managing your media consumption.

1. **Consider the source.** Ask yourself: Who created this and why? Also, ask yourself if the source is biased in favour or against whatever is being shared, or has a vested interest in it. Understanding the source and purpose of the communication will help you figure out if it's rooted in evidence and facts, based on opinion, or purposely trying to mislead you. If you search for the name of the site, company or author, you will often find additional information to help you understand the source.

In addition, sometimes, a quick online search will help tell you if something is based on fact. A myriad of media literacy advocacy organisations, news outlets, institutions and others are working earnestly around the world to combat the spread of misinformation by promoting media literacy. So, depending on where you are, you may find legitimate fact-checking sources that can explain if what you're reading or seeing is factual.

2. **Find supporting sources.** Especially on social media, when you see something that's shared, check for corroborating legitimate sources. In other words, don't automatically trust something as true because someone you know posted it or sent it to you. Consult reputable news outlets, professional associations and other proven sources committed to presenting validated evidence and facts.
3. **Consider the whole context.** Communications are created to grab your attention and compel you to click through for more. Especially if you're skimming headlines or scrolling through Internet search results, it's likely that you're getting a slice of the whole story. Consider whether the information being given is well-researched and/or validated via legitimate expert sources, as well as if there are multiple credible sources.

Also, consider the motivation behind the post. Is it a renowned news organisation committed to informing the public? Is it a self-interested party trying to influence your opinion? Etc.

Try to keep in mind: some ‘messengers’ purposely take information out of context to mislead you.

4. **Consume mindfully.** It’s important to be aware of what you’re doing and why, and how it makes you feel. Do the social media pages and posts you follow enrage you, make you feel sad or give you joy? It can be helpful to create a media log to help yourself understand what you’re consuming, when, to what extent, and how it makes you feel or behave.

Also, consider whether everything you consume is mostly consistent with your own beliefs and interests, enabling you to comfortably dwell in an echo chamber. It’s easy to get into a rhythm – or a rut – and to go back to the same media and sources over and over again. Work on finding ways to gain new experiences and to invite other perspectives.

Mindfully being your own news feed and social media manager can help you keep perspective and be informed without stressing yourself out.

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# 9 ways to support people with disabilities

International Day of Persons with Disabilities is celebrated every year on 3 December to promote the rights of people with disabilities. With this in mind, let's take a look at why this day is so important and how to help raise awareness.

People with physical disabilities are more likely to have depression, stress and anxiety than individuals without physical disabilities.<sup>1</sup> In addition, mental illnesses are the single largest cause of disabilities in the world, with depression the leading cause, and anxiety a major cause.<sup>2,3</sup> Chronic stress can be a trigger for both, as well as for post-traumatic stress disorder and some psychoses.<sup>4</sup>

People with physical and/or mental disabilities – one billion people – are among the most excluded groups in society, and are less likely to access healthcare, education and employment, or participate in the community.<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, many nations and regions around the world are proactively following guidance from the United Nations and the World Health Organization to promote the rights and well-being of people with disabilities.

Here are ways we can each do our part to help people with disabilities be and feel included and accepted:<sup>6</sup>

1. Respect people with disabilities.
2. Talk openly and clearly about mental health. There's no need to whisper or act like it's something to hide.
3. Try to avoid using words that can be hurtful when describing the disability or the people who have them.
4. Don't define a person by their condition. For example, say 'a person living with depression' instead of 'a depressed person'.
5. Both when talking about it or thinking about it, try to see a mental illness the same way as a physical illness.
6. Encourage compassion for people with mental illness. If you're on social media, post supportive and positive things about people facing mental illness.
7. Choose empowerment over shame. If you know someone with a mental illness, be there to support them and listen to them.
8. Be honest about treatment. Treatment for mental illness can really work. If you or someone you care about needs help, make it a priority.
9. Don't harbour self-stigma. If you're going through mental health problems, know that this is a medical problem and you can feel better with the right help. You deserve it.

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