

Life's Little Pleasures!

“Life is better when it is liberally sprinkled with many pleasures...”

If eating is your main source of pleasure, try to find additional pleasures that are not food-related. Consider the following:

Plan for pleasure!

- Make a list of activities or experiences that are pleasurable to you.
- Look for opportunities to experience pleasure.
- Check out event calendars in the newspaper, on the radio or the TV. Go to some of those events that interest you.
- Plan pleasurable activities, such as: dancing, fishing, bowling, golf, walking with friends, taking a vacation, etc.



Experience small everyday pleasures!

- “Stop and smell the roses...”
- Slow down enough to actually **let yourself feel** the pleasure in everyday things. Tell yourself “this really feels good.” Examples:
 - Sleeping
 - Laughing
 - Taking a shower or bath
 - Just relaxing
 - Smelling certain fragrances
 - Driving (sometimes)
 - Having a pleasant conversation
 - Enjoying the sunshine
 - Doing something well

What are some of the pleasures you might enjoy? Write them down and make a plan to get started today.

MOVE!



Stress: How to Cope Better With Life's Challenges

What causes stress?

Feelings of stress are caused by the body's instinct to defend itself. This instinct is good in emergencies, such as getting out of the way of a speeding car. But stress can cause physical symptoms if it goes on for too long, such as in response to life's daily challenges and changes.

When this happens, it's as though your body gets ready to jump out of the way of the car, but you're sitting still. Your body is working overtime, with no place to put all the extra energy. This can make you feel anxious, afraid, worried and uptight.

What changes may be stressful?

Any sort of change can make you feel stressed, even good change. It's not just the change or event itself, but also how you react to it that matters. What's stressful is different for each person. For example, one person may feel stressed by retiring from work, while someone else may not.

Other things that may be stressful include being laid off from your job, your child leaving or returning home, the death of your spouse, divorce or marriage, an illness, an injury, a job promotion, money problems, moving, or having a baby.

Can stress hurt my health?

Stress can cause health problems or make problems worse if you don't learn ways to deal with it. Talk to your family doctor if you think some of your symptoms are caused by stress. It's important to make sure that your symptoms aren't caused by other health problems.

Possible signs of stress

- Anxiety
- Back pain
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Problems with relationships
- Shortness of breath
- Stiff neck
- Upset stomach
- Weight gain or loss

What can I do to manage my stress?

The first step is to learn to recognize when you're feeling stressed. Early warning signs of stress include tension in your shoulders and neck, or clenching your hands into fists.

The next step is to choose a way to deal with your stress. One way is to avoid the event or thing that leads to your stress--but often this is not possible. A second way is to change how you react to stress. This is often the best way.

Tips for dealing with stress

- Don't worry about things you can't control, such as the weather.
- Prepare to the best of your ability for events you know may be stressful, such as a job interview.
- Try to look at change as a positive challenge, not as a threat.
- Work to resolve conflicts with other people.
- Talk with a trusted friend, family member or counselor.
- Set realistic goals at home and at work.
- Exercise on a regular basis.
- Eat well-balanced meals and get enough sleep.
- Meditate.
- Participate in something you don't find stressful, such as sports, social events or hobbies.

Why is exercise useful?

Exercise is a good way to deal with stress because it's a healthy way to relieve your pent-up energy and tension. It also helps you get in better shape, which makes you feel better overall.

What is meditation? Steps to deep breathing:

- Lie down on a flat surface.
- Place a hand on your stomach, just above your navel. Place the other hand on your chest
- Breathe in slowly and try to make your stomach rise a little.
- Hold your breath for a second.
- Breathe out slowly and let your stomach go back down.

Meditation is a form of guided thought. It can take many forms. You may do it with exercise that uses the same motions over and over, like walking or swimming. You may meditate by practicing relaxation training, by stretching or by breathing deeply.

Relaxation training is easy. Start with one muscle. Hold it tight for a few seconds then relax the muscle. Do this with each of your muscles.

Stretching can also help relieve tension. Roll your head in a gentle circle. Reach toward the ceiling and bend side to side slowly. Roll your shoulders.

Deep, relaxed breathing by itself may help relieve stress. This helps you get plenty of oxygen.

How can I improve my emotional health?

First, try to recognize your emotions and understand why you are having them. Sorting out the causes of sadness, stress and anxiety in your life can help you manage your emotional health. The following are some other helpful tips.

Express your feelings in appropriate ways. If feelings of stress, sadness or anxiety are causing physical problems, keeping these feelings inside can make you feel worse. It's OK to let your loved ones know when something is bothering you. However, keep in mind that your family and friends may not be able to help you deal with your feelings appropriately. At these times, ask someone outside the situation--such as your family doctor, a counselor or a religious advisor--for advice and support to help you improve your emotional health.

Live a balanced life. Try not to obsess about the problems at work, school or home that lead to negative feelings. This doesn't mean you have to pretend to be happy when you feel stressed, anxious or upset. It's important to deal with these negative feelings, but try to focus on the positive things in your life too. You may want to use a journal to keep track of things that make you feel happy or peaceful. Some research has shown that having a positive outlook can improve your quality of life and give your health a boost. You may also need to find ways to let go of some things in your life that make you feel stressed and overwhelmed. Make time for things you enjoy.

Calm your mind and body. Relaxation methods, such as meditation, are useful ways to bring your emotions into balance. Meditation is a form of guided thought. It can take many forms. For example, you may do it by exercising, stretching or breathing deeply. Ask your family doctor for advice about relaxation methods.

Take care of yourself. To have good emotional health, it's important to take care of your body by having a regular routine for eating healthy meals, getting enough sleep and exercising to relieve pent-up tension. Avoid overeating and don't abuse drugs or alcohol. Using drugs or alcohol just causes other problems, such as family and health problems.

Dealing With Stress, Anxiety and Depression

Stress, anxiety, and depression influence your eating and physical activity habits and your weight. Some problems require professional assistance. The VA has services that can help. Discuss your concerns with your primary care provider.

Here are some things that you can try for yourself:



Change Your Thinking:

- Your mood (sad, nervous, stressed, etc.) comes from your thoughts and what you tell yourself. In most cases, you can control your mood by choosing what you think about and what you tell yourself.
- When you are feeling too much stress, be aware of what you are thinking. Are these thoughts making you feel worse? If so, then replace them with more positive thoughts. Make a list of 4-5 positive statements about yourself that you can use when feeling stressed. Here are some examples:
 - I can control my reaction to a situation, even if I can't control the situation.
 - I am a good person.
 - I am calm and relaxed.
 - I am at peace with myself and with the world around me.
 - I will accept the things I cannot change. I will have the courage to change the things I can and I will learn to know the difference.



Help Your Body Handle Stress:

- Make physical activity a part of every day.
- Eat a healthy diet high in fruit and vegetables. Drink plenty of water.
- Get enough rest.
- Try a massage.
- Take a long shower or bath.
- Take a break from stressful situations: count to 10, take a deep breath, daydream, or take a vacation if you can.
- Divide big tasks into little ones, and tackle one at a time.
- Learn how to relax and practice this regularly. Relaxation training is available through the VA.
- Arrange to have some quiet time for yourself each day.
- Talk over your troubles with someone you trust.
- Take the time to do things you enjoy.
- Plan ahead and pace yourself so you aren't late or in a terrible rush.
- Listen to or make music, paint, or express yourself artistically.
- Picture yourself handling particular stressful situations calmly and effectively.





Action Plan

This week I will _____ (What)
 _____ (How Much)
 _____ (When)
 _____ (How Often)

Circle how sure you are that you can do this action:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*If your answer is less than 7, you may not be able to meet your goal.
 Think about modifying your plan to be more doable.*

Give yourself a check mark each day you accomplish your plan	Comments: Write yourself a note about today's activity.
<input type="checkbox"/> Monday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Thursday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Friday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday	

Possible road blocks to meeting my plan:

Things I can do to overcome these road blocks:

Other resources I need to meet my action plan:
