



Stress Management Coaching

Understanding and handling stress



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The information presented here is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always consult a health care professional if you have concerns about your well-being.

You will see links or references to resources available on the LifeWorks platform throughout this booklet. To access these, you will need to log in with your username and password. If you do not know your login credentials, ask your health coach or your HR representative.

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Stress can have a negative impact on both physical and emotional health.



The top three sources of stress for most people are money, work, and family responsibilities.

-American Psychological Association

Getting the better of stress

Where there is life, there is stress. Small amounts of stress are a natural part of life and can actually be helpful. We can think of this as positive stress. Having a deadline for a project can provide just the edge you need to get the project done. Having a to-do list brings stress, but it also provides a framework for completing tasks. Life changes such as a promotion at work or a new baby in the family can be welcome causes for celebration, but they bring their own kinds of stress.

Other kinds of stress—negative stress—can be harder to manage. An illness, a child's difficulty in school, problems at work—all can cause stress. This kind of stress, if left unmanaged, can affect our sleep, relationships, and health and well-being. It can have negative effects on our work life, too, affecting our productivity and ability to work well with others.

When stress starts to feel overwhelming, it's time to step back, assess, and learn to develop strategies to manage our stress.

This workbook provides tools that will help you respond to stress in a healthier way and make stress management a routine part of your life.



Chapter 1

Understanding Stress

Stress is related to our earliest biological responses. When our early ancestors were confronted with a threat (such as a hungry tiger), they began to breathe faster and perspire. Their hearts raced. Their blood pressure shot up. Their survival instincts prepared them to either fight or run away—what's now known as the "fight-or-flight response." These physical reactions helped our ancestors confront the threat. Once the threat was gone, stress hormones returned to lower levels.

Today, most of us don't fight tigers. But when we confront modern stressors—traffic jams, conflicts at home, tight deadlines at work—our bodies react in much the same way as our ancestors' bodies did. But because we can't fight or run away every time we feel stressed, our bodies become filled with stress hormones that simply have no place to go.

Over time, the buildup of stress hormones can lead to physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, insomnia, stomach problems, high blood pressure, weight problems, and even heart attacks or strokes. It can also affect our levels of patience and understanding, and our mood and motivation.

We need to learn to manage stress before it causes damage to our physical or emotional health. While we can't eliminate the stress in our lives, we can learn to better manage our reactions to stress.

What affects our stress levels?

The following factors affect our level of stress:

- events, demands, and situations—especially when they're out of our control
- our reactions—personal mind and body responses
- our expectations—which may be reasonable or unreasonable
- our perceptions—our own unique view of the circumstances
- our emotions and thoughts—which can have positive or negative effects

It's important to remember that everyone reacts differently to stress. And it's important to learn to handle your own stress reactions in the way that is most effective for you.

Changing how we think about stressors

The way we think about and react to stressors in our lives is the biggest predictor of how large our stress will become. Our thoughts play a big role in how we perceive the world around us. When we're experiencing extra stress, we may invent possible and sometimes improbable outcomes, which create worrying and which may impact our quality and quantity of sleep, and lead to other negative effects.

How do you talk to yourself about stress?

All of us carry on an internal dialogue that shapes our reactions to stress. That dialogue can make a situation feel worse, or more stressful than it really is. The goal is to learn to direct your internal dialogue and thought processes so that they work for you instead of against you. This results in constructive feelings and actions that can help you deal with stress more effectively.

How positive and negative emotions affect our reactions to stress

People who have a positive attitude believe they have control over what happens to them instead of thinking that the future is in the hands of others or is simply subject to luck or fate. They tend to see tough—or stressful—situations as temporary and believe that those situations will go away with time. Research shows that positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and contentment even have protective health qualities. Expressing these health-giving emotions isn't just good for your health; it also helps to reduce stress.

Negative emotions are different. They can help us adapt to stress in certain situations. For example, when appropriately expressed, anger can help us focus attention on problems and resolutions. Sadness can provide an opportunity for reflection and help us process grief. Fear can protect us from danger. But when taken too far, negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear can become significant sources of stress in and of themselves.

Thinking about your emotional reactions to stress

The exercise opposite will help you think about how you react to potentially stressful events, demands, or situations. Place a check mark by

your most likely reactions. Be honest with yourself. This will help you create a personal plan for managing your stress.

When you are faced with a potentially stressful event, demand, or situation, how do you tend to respond?

I'm pretty cool, calm, and laid back.

I get mad quickly.

I'm pretty consistent and predictable.

People never know what reactions will come out of me.

Everything is a crisis.

I think first, react second.

I tend to see the worst in things and focus on the problem, not the solution.

I stay on the sunny side and look for workable solutions.

I go with the flow.

I know the right way to do things and I can't understand why people don't listen.

I try to use humor to take the tension out of the situation. I don't hold on to tension or anxiety.

I have a hard time letting go of stressful feelings.

Other people's reactions have an effect on me.

I tend to step back and look at things objectively without a lot of emotion.

I tend to deny there's stress or keep my reactions hidden.

I like to keep small things small and manage big things well.

Other ways you react that aren't included above

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Learning more about your stress reactions

Answering these questions will help you understand your stress reactions even better:

1. What do you think you're doing well to manage your reactions to stress?

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2. How do you contribute to your own level of stress?

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3. What do you need to work on?

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Symptoms of stress can also be symptoms of illness. Be sure to discuss any severe, persistent, new, or troubling symptoms with your health care professional

Chapter 2

How stress affects your health

Long-term, negative, or unproductive stress causes physical changes in our body that can adversely affect our health. There are a number of early warning signs that stress is beginning to get to us. They are the body's and mind's ways of telling us that something has to change.

Symptoms of stress

Using the following scoring system, rate the frequency with which you've experienced any of these symptoms in the past two months:

0 = Never

1 = Occasionally or rarely

2 = Every week

3 = Every day or nearly every day

Symptom	Never	Rarely	Weekly	Daily
Headache	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abdominal pain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upset stomach, indigestion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excess gas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Back pain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sleep problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chest pain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Heartburn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Symptom	Never	Rarely	Weekly	Daily
Neck pain				
Tooth/jaw pain				
Skin rashes				
Muscle tension				
Sweating				
Anxiety/panic				
Pounding of heart				
Forgetfulness				
Inability to turn off thoughts				
Trouble concentrating				
Increased smoking				
Increased use of alcohol				
Increased use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs				
More accidents on or off the job				
Decreased productivity				
Constant worry at work				
Increased lateness for work				
Increased absences from work				
Missing deadlines or meetings				

Symptom	Never	Rarely	Weekly	Daily
Decreased work morale				
Job dissatisfaction				
Feeling there's no time to relax				
Constant impatience				
Increased fear of certain things				
Emotional outbursts				
Crying easily				
Feeling blue, gloomy				
Hopelessness				
Loss of sense of humor				
Difficulty making decisions				
Trouble waking in the morning				
Fatigue, loss of energy				
Inability to complete tasks				
Loss of appetite				
High degree of self-criticism				
Disturbed relationships				
Dryness of throat or mouth				

Symptom	Never	Rarely	Weekly	Daily
Feeling victimized				
Agitation or irritability				
Loss of sexual interest				
Nervousness or nervous habits				

Your Score

What your score means

Less than 10

Your body is probably already handling stress in positive ways. Congratulations!

10 to 19

Your stress symptoms are mild but could become troublesome. This workbook will help you learn ways you can manage your stress to reduce the number of symptoms you experience.

20 to 29

You may experience some impairment of your functioning due to stress-related symptoms. Talk with your doctor about any severe physical symptoms. This workbook will provide you with strategies for managing your stress and relieving symptoms.

30 or higher

It's likely that stress is causing you physical illness and interfering significantly with your enjoyment of life. Better managing your stress can

bring you real relief. Be sure to speak with your doctor about any severe or troubling symptoms.

Whatever your score, if you are experiencing even one symptom that is making it difficult to participate in daily activities and responsibilities to the best of your ability, please contact your health care provider or LifeWorks, your EAP (employee assistance program).

Practicing stress-management techniques regularly will help you reduce the effects that stress has on your body. At first, you will need to make a conscious effort to change your responses to stress. In time, though, your response to stressors is likely to become subconscious and positive.

Your daily habits and the way you live your life can have a big impact on your health and well-being, and also on how effectively you handle stress. So let's take a moment now to look at your lifestyle and habits.

Is your lifestyle causing you stress?

Answer "Yes" or "No" to the following questions.

When you are under stress, do you:	Yes	No
Smoke or use tobacco	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drink more than two to three cups per day of coffee or caffeinated drinks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drink more than one to two drinks per day of alcoholic beverages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use more than the prescribed dose of over-the-counter or prescription medications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overeat or eat too little	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overspend (e.g., do you have a lot of credit card debt)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watch more than three to four hours a day of TV or videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend hours a day on social media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have angry outbursts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take illegal drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Withdraw from people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ignore or deny stress symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engage in self-destructive relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stay up very late/not get enough sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sleep more than usual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

"Yes" responses to the questions above are examples of negative behaviors associated with stress, also known as negative self-care activities.

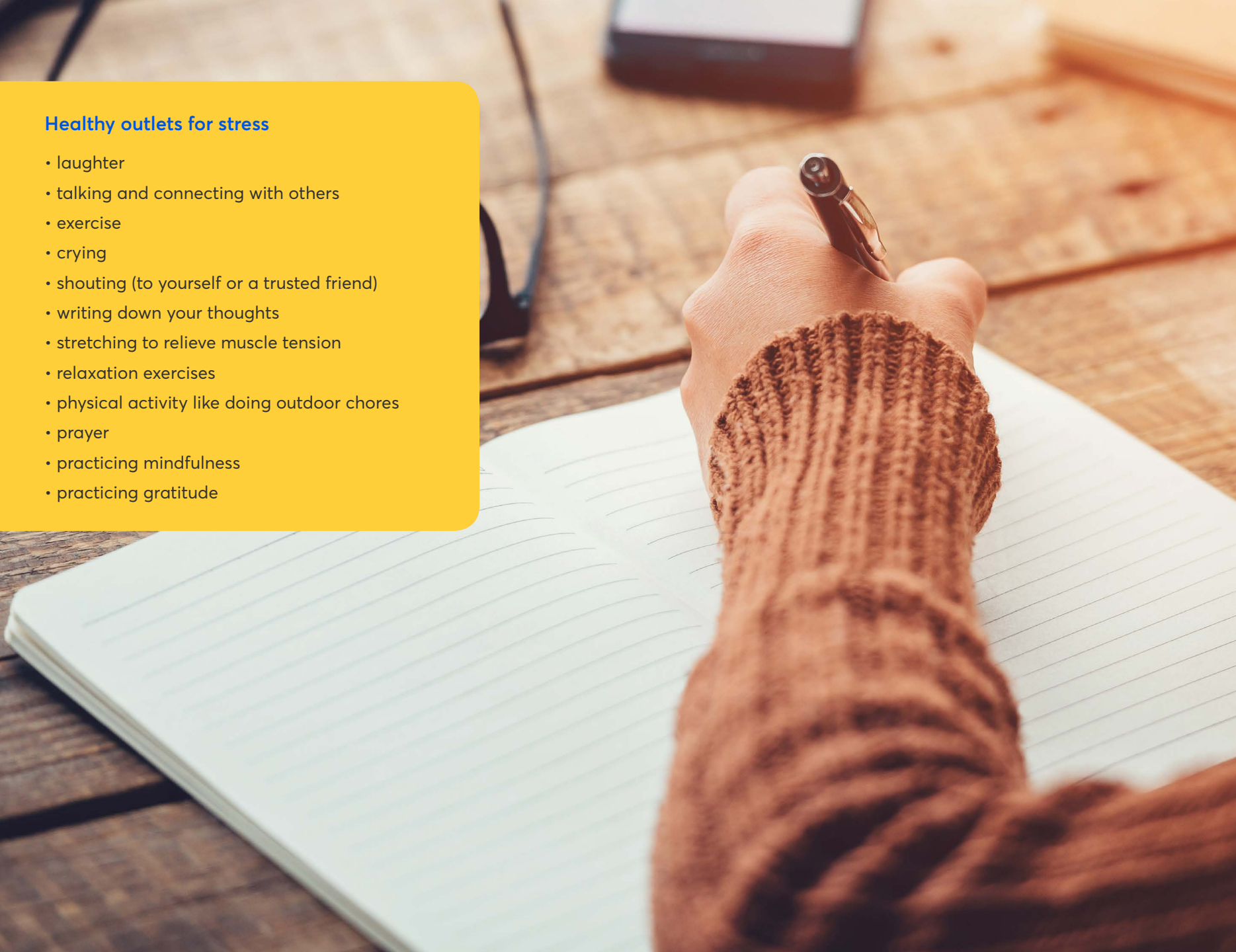
Now answer "Yes" or "No" to these questions.

When you are under stress, do you:	Yes	No
Engage in physical activity at least three times a week for 30 minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get seven to nine hours of sleep every night	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain good eating habits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make time to relax	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain a sense of humor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pursue hobbies and interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain healthy routines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stay optimistic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time with family and/or friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make plans for the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Figure out ways to manage the stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reward yourself for your accomplishments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

"Yes" responses to the questions above are examples of positive behaviors associated with stress, also known as negative self-care activities. And that's the goal!

Healthy outlets for stress

- laughter
- talking and connecting with others
- exercise
- crying
- shouting (to yourself or a trusted friend)
- writing down your thoughts
- stretching to relieve muscle tension
- relaxation exercises
- physical activity like doing outdoor chores
- prayer
- practicing mindfulness
- practicing gratitude



Evaluate your self-care

After reviewing your responses to the previous exercise, evaluate your self-care by answering these questions:

1. What do you do to take care of yourself during ordinary times?

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2. Do your self-care activities change during stressful times or are they the same?

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3. What can you do to take better care of yourself during stressful times?

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4. What negative self-care tendencies can you change?

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5. What positive self-care strategies can you realistically start doing today?

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Chapter 3

Practicing self-care

We all know the right way to prepare for a long car trip. We check to make sure the car is in good working order. We calculate how much time the trip will take and plan our route. And, of course, we fill the tank with fuel.

Unfortunately, many of us take better care of our cars than we do our bodies. But we can learn something from vehicle maintenance that we can transfer to our own lives when it comes to managing stress. We need to make sure we have the right food, exercise, and rest. If we don't take care of ourselves every day, stress can build up and create major problems.

Food as fuel

Eating healthy foods throughout the day helps to keep your energy levels consistent. For some people, eating smaller meals five to six times a day can help maintain energy levels. If that's not appropriate for you, be sure to fuel sufficiently at breakfast and refuel at lunchtime. For most people, it's best to eat less later in the day.

To stay alert and maintain high levels of performance, experts recommend healthy carbohydrates (whole grains, fruits, vegetables), moderate amounts of lean protein (chicken, fish, dairy), and smaller amounts of healthy fats (olive oil, nuts, avocados, salmon).

When you're feeling extra stress, keep these healthy eating strategies in mind:

- **Eat healthy foods for optimum energy.** You might eat fruit with nuts or cheese; vegetables, a hard-boiled egg, or whole-grain crackers with hummus; or peanut butter with fruit.
- **Limit junk foods (especially sweets).** These foods don't help boost energy. They may even contribute to dips in your energy levels.
- **Eat regular meals, especially breakfast and lunch.** Without enough healthy nutrients, your mind and body can become more sluggish and fatigued.
- **Stay hydrated. Drink a glass of water or other healthy beverage with every meal and another glass between meals.** Healthy beverages include water with natural flavorings (but not added sugar) and many types of herbal tea. Avoid drinks with added sugar, like sodas, energy drinks, and sports drinks.

Get regular exercise

Regular physical activity is important for good health, and it's especially important when you're under extra stress. Physical activity can improve your mood, promote better sleep, help release pent-up stress, and keep your body strong. Exercise strengthens your bones and muscles, helps lower blood pressure, and reduces your risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome, and some cancers.

How much physical activity should you be getting?

According to the Mayo Clinic, any form of exercise can help with stress, regardless of fitness level. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend building up to 150 minutes of activity at a moderate intensity, however some people may need a bit more or less, depending on their unique circumstances.

Aerobic exercises include activities like swimming, bicycling, walking, running, and hiking.

Muscle or strength-building activities include weight-bearing exercises with free weights, using weight machines, working with resistance bands, or doing exercises that use body weight for resistance, such as push-ups or sit-ups. To set up a routine that's appropriate for your age and physical-activity level, talk with a certified fitness trainer or a health care professional.



Talk with your health care professional about starting an exercise program, especially if you don't currently exercise regularly or if you have any medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, or a family history of heart attack or high blood pressure.

The best time of day to exercise is the time when you are most likely to do it regularly. Remember that it does not need to be done all at once and can be completed in 10-minute increments. Research shows that exercising for 10 minutes three times a day provides many of the same health benefits as exercising for 30 minutes all at once. And in fact, recent research has shown that any number of minutes of physical activity at one time can count towards a healthy daily level.

Getting motivated

It can be hard to start a routine of regular activity if you haven't exercised for a while, or if you're feeling less energetic because of your stress. It can help if you:

- **Replace the word "exercise" with another word when you're thinking about being physically active.** When you're making your plans, think to yourself, "I'm going to spend 30 minutes increasing my energy (or reducing my stress)." Or simply think in terms of the action itself: "I'm going to spend time dancing (or swimming or walking with friends)."
- **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** It's important to be active at the level that is comfortable for you and that you will actually be able to complete. If you are able to walk 15 minutes—or five minutes—a day given your current health and circumstances, that's fine. Try to move at least the same amount you did yesterday, if not a little more, to gradually build up to your goal.
- **Remind yourself of why you want to increase movement and be active in the first place.** "I'm choosing to be active because I know it will reduce my stress levels."
- **Use an app or a fitness device to help you track your physical activity.**

- **Let LifeWorks help you keep active.** Go online to the LifeWorks platform by browser (login.lifeworks.com) or download the mobile app for iOS or Android for exercise tips. Or for help improving your eating or exercise habits, consider enrolling in our weight management health & wellness coaching program.

Build healthy sleep habits

Most American adults sleep fewer than the 7 to 9 hours recommended by sleep experts. People who are sleep-deprived are more likely to experience poor concentration and irritability, have accidents, and suffer from depression, according to the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School. Sufficient sleep, on the other hand, refreshes the mind and body, and strengthens the body's natural immunities.

Pay close attention to your sleep habits, especially when you are stressed. Are you getting enough sleep? Building healthy sleep habits will help improve your response to stress. And it will help keep you healthy no matter what levels of stress you're facing.

Here are some tips to help you assess and improve the quality and quantity of sleep you're getting:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day. A predictable schedule sets your body's "internal clock" to expect to sleep at a certain time each night.
- Create a sleep routine. Ease the transition to sleep by engaging in relaxing activities beginning an hour or so before bedtime. You might take a bath, do some light reading, or listen to soothing music.
- Get regular exercise. Daily exercise can help you get to sleep faster and sleep better. Exercise stimulates your body's secretion of the hormone cortisol, which promotes alertness. If you notice that you feel too alert when you want to sleep, avoid exercising in the hours before bedtime.
- Limit caffeine, sugar, alcohol, nicotine, and other substances that may keep you awake. Stay away from these when it's close to bedtime, and stop consuming caffeine (including caffeine from chocolate) four to six hours before you want to fall asleep.
- Watch what—and when—you eat at night. Finish your evening meal several hours before you go to bed, and avoid foods that you know upset your stomach, are harder to digest, and could keep you awake.
- Make your bedroom comfortable for sleeping. Your room should be cool, dark, and quiet. Consider whether any pets in the bedroom are interrupting your sleep.
- Deal with stressful tasks earlier in the day or evening. It may be harder to relax and go to sleep if you engage in demanding tasks like paying bills or dealing with a difficult parenting issue just before bedtime.
- Limit certain electronics at bedtime. Be aware of television, radio, and computer activities just before bed, as they may be overly stimulating. If you watch TV to unwind, remember that potentially disturbing programs—such as news or crime shows—can make it hard to fall asleep.
- Have a last check-in time for email, text messages, social media, and other online activities—then turn your devices off. Exposure to blue light emitted by electronics prevents the release of melatonin and can make it hard to fall asleep. It is recommended that use of these devices be limited in the hours before bedtime.

Relaxation techniques

For many people, relaxing means having a cigarette, a cup of coffee or an alcoholic drink, watching TV, or eating comfort food. Although each of these responses may offer temporary pleasure and relief, they won't relieve physical stress. In fact, smoking or drinking coffee can actually increase physical stress by causing the heart to beat faster and blood pressure to rise.

Relaxation techniques can help ease the physical symptoms of stress that are caused by the fight-or-flight response. The following techniques will help you relax and reduce tension.

Breathing exercises

Simple breathing

Try breathing by thinking of your stomach as an inflating and deflating balloon.

Breathing through your nose, with one hand on your belly:

- Breathe in, pushing your belly out (the balloon inflates).
- Breathe out, bringing your belly in (the balloon deflates). Practice one: Breathe in, breathe out. Repeat several times. Practice two: Breathe in, hold, breathe out. Repeat several times.

Full-breath exercise

Breathing through your nose:

- Breathe out deeply, emptying your belly.
- Breathe in slowly, filling up your belly.

- Continue breathing in as you expand your chest.
- Continue breathing in as you raise your shoulders up toward your ears.
- Hold for a few comfortable seconds.
- Breathe out, reversing the pattern. Release your shoulders, relax your chest, and empty your belly of air.
- Repeat until the process feels smooth and natural.

Other stress-reduction exercises

My favorite things—to look at, listen to, touch, or smell

Do you have a special object—something that makes you feel good when you see or touch it? Maybe it's a seashell from a vacation, a photograph of a friend or family member, or a treasured stone you've had since childhood. Whatever you choose, it should make you smile and remember a happy time.

If it's small enough, carry it in your pocket or purse. If it's larger, post it on a wall or keep it near you on a desk or table. In times of stress it can remind you that the way you feel right now doesn't negate all the other wonderful things in your life.

Play your favorite music. What makes you happy? What music gives you a good feeling?

Count to 10

When you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed, stop and count slowly to 10. Taking a time-out can help you put things in perspective and subdue your fight-or-flight reaction. As you count to yourself, breathe deeply.

Quiet the mind and body

You need quiet as part of your daily routine. Quiet times slow down your mind and body so they can be rested and ready when you need to speed them up to productive levels.

Sit quietly and breathe deeply. Shut your eyes. Take two or three long, slow breaths.

- Bend at your waist and hang forward with your arms and head downward. Let the tension run off the ends of your fingers.

- Return to an upright position.
- Take two or three more deep breaths.
- Sit quietly for a moment.
- Return to your work activity.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means tuning your mind in to the present moment. Think of mindfulness as paying attention on purpose. When you pay attention to just one thing—whether it's a conversation with a co-worker, how your lunch tastes, or how you feel on your ride home from work—you will notice a new sense of serenity.

Gratitude and appreciation

Experts in the field of positive psychology say that being kind to others, and being grateful and appreciative for what you have, can make you happier. Taking the time to count your blessings at least once a week can increase overall life satisfaction, boost your mood, and maybe even your health. It can also help you feel less stressed.

- **Take time each week to make a gratitude list.** Write down the things for which you are grateful.
- **Express your appreciation to others.** Write a thank-you note to a parent, child, teacher, mentor, or someone else in your life, thanking them for the things they have done for you. Sharing appreciative thoughts can help you feel calmer and happier.
- **End your day with positive thoughts.** Try writing down three things that went well. Also write down why they went well.

Give the preceding ideas a try. Instead of having thoughts that are cynical, judgmental, or impatient, try to look for the good in situations.

Write down your own ideas here for how you might turn negative thoughts or behaviors into positive ones.

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My action plan: Taking care of myself

Because you're the only one who can really take care of you, you're the only one who can set goals that work with your schedule and personality.

Set your goal

When you set your goal, make sure that:

- the goal is specific
- you establish a timeframe for meeting the goal
- you can measure or evaluate an outcome

You may want to start taking care of yourself by being more physically active.

Example: Tomorrow I will start walking to take better care of myself. I will walk a mile three times a week in the morning or after work.

Plan for barriers

Sometimes things happen that can interfere with our plans to meet a goal. It's important to think about possible barriers ahead of time and come up with ways to overcome them.

Example: On days when the weather is bad, I will walk inside at the gym.
Describe your backup plan here:

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Find support

It can be a good idea to enlist friends or family to help make sure that you can reach your goal.

Example: I'll ask a friend to be my exercise buddy so I have someone to walk with.

Where will you find support?

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Track your success

Measurement is key to making sure you stick with your plan.

Example: I'll keep track in a note on my phone of the days I plan to walk and how much I actually did walk.

How will you measure your success?

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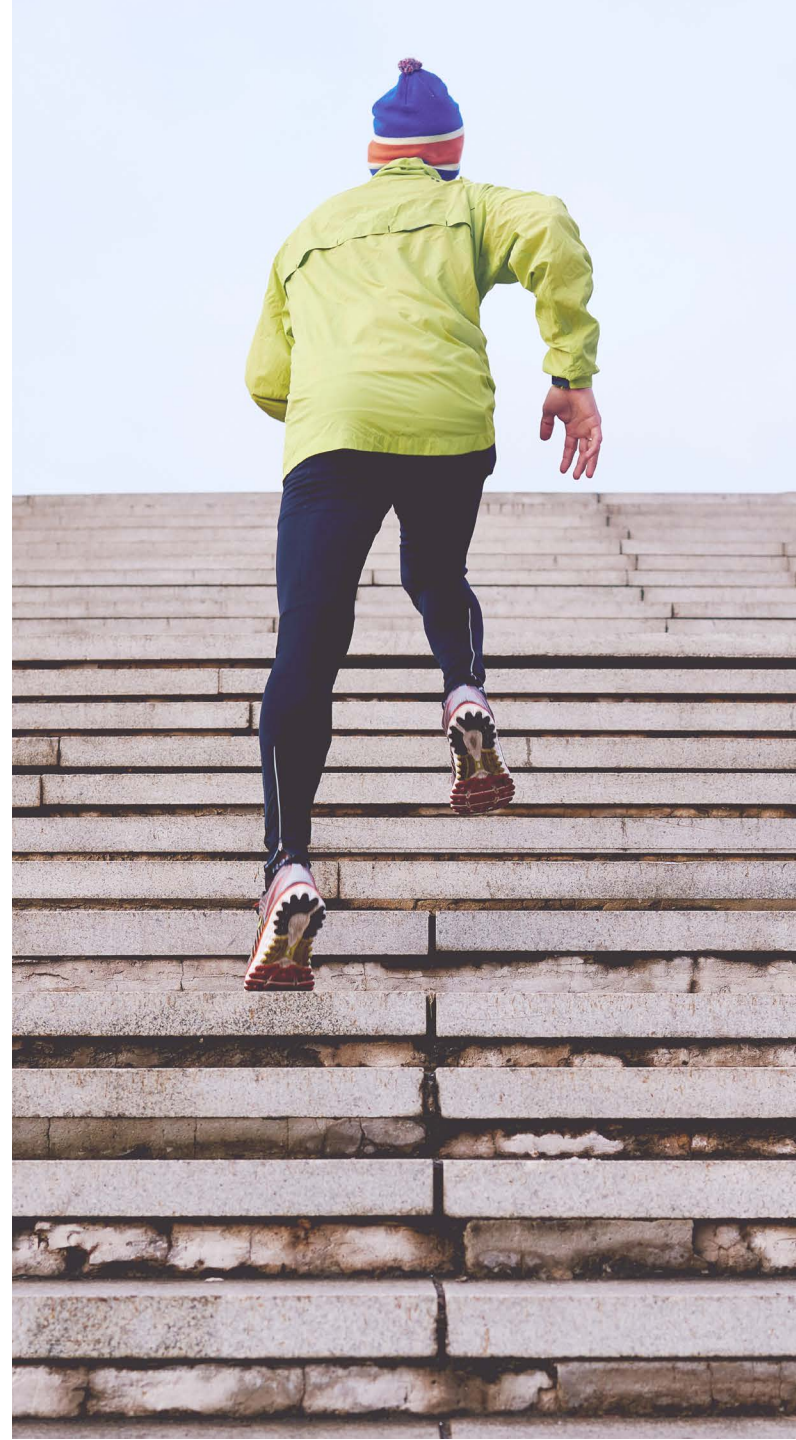
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What's next?

As you move forward, be sure to exercise regularly, eat well, drink enough water, get enough sleep, and make time to relax each day, even if it's just for a few minutes. And be sure to use the relaxation techniques described here regularly, whether you feel stressed or not.

On the pages that follow you'll read about specific kinds of stressors you may be experiencing—stress at work, relationship stress, or perhaps stress due to a life change. Because it's not unusual for stressors to overlap, we encourage you to read all the information that applies to you as you develop a personalized plan for managing your stress.



Chapter 4

Stress at work

According to Galen, the second-century Greek physician, "Employment is nature's physician and is essential to human happiness."

And yet there are times when work is the most stressful thing we do.

Job stress happens when we experience tension with job demands, work conditions, or work relationships. It also results when the demands of a job aren't a good match with our skills, interests, personality, or needs.

Different people react differently to job stress. A stressful situation for one person might actually be energizing to another. It's important to become aware of your own stress warning signs and triggers, and the effects that stress can have on your health.

Learning from a rubber band

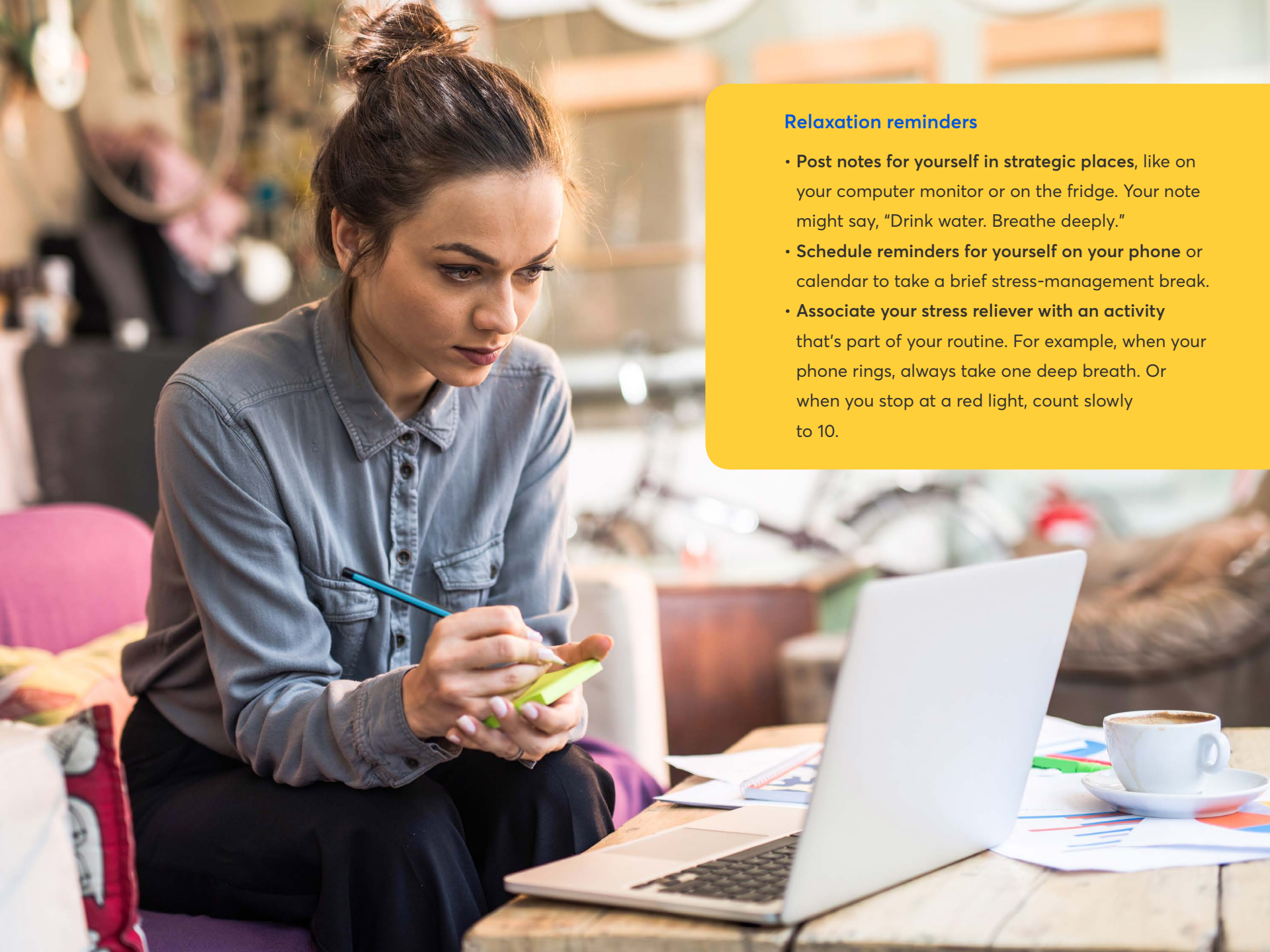
When it's not being used, a rubber band is limp and lifeless. When put to use, it's being stretched—or pressured. With the right amount of stretch, the rubber band works well. When stretched beyond its limits, it becomes less useful and may even break.

How does this apply to stress at work? We tend to be most productive and efficient when we're able to work within our elastic limits. When faced with occasional "out of limits" short-term demands, we try to adapt to and manage the situation. But when faced with too many demands that are

too big and occur too often, we may experience strain and even long-term health problems.

Just as different people react differently to stress, every person's tolerance level varies from time to time. One of your challenges will be to try to maintain a level of well-being that allows you to handle stress on the job consistently and positively. Positive stress helps us meet deadlines, learn new ways of working, or even get up in the morning to face life's challenges.

It's the negative stress, especially when it's intense or prolonged, that we must learn to manage effectively.



Relaxation reminders

- **Post notes for yourself in strategic places**, like on your computer monitor or on the fridge. Your note might say, "Drink water. Breathe deeply."
- **Schedule reminders for yourself on your phone or calendar** to take a brief stress-management break.
- **Associate your stress reliever with an activity** that's part of your routine. For example, when your phone rings, always take one deep breath. Or when you stop at a red light, count slowly to 10.

Other stress-reduction exercises

My favorite things—to look at, listen to, touch, or smell

Do you have a special object—something that makes you feel good when you see or touch it? Maybe it's a seashell from a vacation, a photograph of a friend or family member, or a treasured stone you've had since childhood. Whatever you choose, it should make you smile and remember a happy time.

If it's small enough, carry it in your pocket or purse. If it's larger, post it on a wall or keep it near you on a desk or table. In times of stress it can remind you that the way you feel right now doesn't negate all the other wonderful things in your life.

Play your favorite music. What makes you happy? What music gives you a good feeling?

Count to 10

When you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed, stop and count slowly to 10. Taking a time-out can help you put things in perspective and subdue your fight-or-flight reaction. As you count to yourself, breathe deeply.

Quiet the mind and body

You need quiet as part of your daily routine. Quiet times slow down your mind and body so they can be rested and ready when you need to speed them up to productive levels.

Sit quietly and breathe deeply. Shut your eyes. Take two or three long, slow breaths.

- Bend at your waist and hang forward with your arms and head downward. Let the tension run off the ends of your fingers.

- Return to an upright position.
- Take two or three more deep breaths.
- Sit quietly for a moment.
- Return to your work activity.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means tuning your mind in to the present moment. Think of mindfulness as paying attention on purpose. When you pay attention to just one thing—whether it's a conversation with a co-worker, how your lunch tastes, or how you feel on your ride home from work—you will notice a new sense of serenity.

Gratitude and appreciation

Experts in the field of positive psychology say that being kind to others, and being grateful and appreciative for what you have, can make you happier. Taking the time to count your blessings at least once a week can increase overall life satisfaction, boost your mood, and maybe even your health. It can also help you feel less stressed.

- **Take time each week to make a gratitude list.** Write down the things for which you are grateful.
- **Express your appreciation to others.** Write a thank-you note to a parent, child, teacher, mentor, or someone else in your life, thanking them for the things they have done for you. Sharing appreciative thoughts can help you feel calmer and happier.
- **End your day with positive thoughts.** Try writing down three things that went well. Also write down why they went well.

Your typical workday

Most people value some structure in their work lives. Being able to work with a degree of predictability and consistency helps to provide a foundation for performing daily tasks.

The following exercise will help you look at your own daily routines as a way to reduce stress on your job:

1. How do you start out your morning each workday at home?
2. How do you transition from home to work each day?
3. How do you start your workday on the job?
4. What is your typical pattern of working throughout the workday?
5. How do you handle your daily breaks at work?
6. How do you usually end your workday?
7. How do you transition from work back to home?
8. What do you usually do when you arrive home?

After thinking about your answers to the questions above, answer these questions:

1. Do you feel good about the way you handle your typical workday, and is the pattern a good one for you?
2. Do you experience any stress from the way you handle your workday?
3. Are there any changes that you would like to make in how you handle your typical workday?

16 ways to manage your workday before it manages you

1. Give yourself enough time to wake up and prepare for work without feeling rushed.
2. Start your workday at the same time every day, have a good breakfast, and take healthy snacks to work.
3. Find the least stressful route to work—and the least stressful means of transportation.
4. At work, commit to thinking positively and remember that you can influence your own thinking.
5. Start your daily routine by planning.
6. Expect that the unexpected will occur and plan ways to handle it.
7. Work at your own productive pace as much as possible.
8. Try to limit multitasking as much as possible. When you are working on a focused task, resist the temptation to respond to email.
9. Monitor your stress levels throughout the workday and use your relaxation techniques if you feel stressed.
10. Use your breaks to re-energize.
11. At the end of the day, clean up and put away your work materials, and use the last few minutes of your workday to review your accomplishments.
12. If you work from home, be sure that you can walk away from your desk at the end of the day. Ideally, try not to have your home office in your bedroom. Be sure to turn off your computer and other home-office equipment at the end of your workday to reduce the temptation to check email or do other tasks.
13. Look at how you handled the stress that occurred during the workday and ask yourself if there's a better way you can cope tomorrow.
14. On the way home—or at home—allow yourself to unwind and de-stress.
15. Do the opposite! If your job is a mental one, do something physical before or after you get home. If your job is physical, find an opportunity to rest and relax, or find some sort of mental stimulation (reading a book, for example).
16. Go to sleep at the same time every day of the workweek.

How's your job fit?

One source of job stress is the degree of fit between you and your job.

Check either "Yes" or "No" after each of these questions:

Questions	Yes	No
Is your working environment a good match for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are your skills and interests similar to those of your co-workers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you like what you do at work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find value and meaning in what you do?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you use many of your skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the physical demands (lifting, moving) about right for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the mental demands (challenging thinking, complexity) about right for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the technical challenges (special job-related know-how) about right for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you get a sense of accomplishment from your job?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you didn't have to work, would you continue to do your job?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you had to do it all over again, would you choose the same work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you continue to be motivated and energized by your job?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the rewards (benefits, wages) of the job about right for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you see a good future for yourself with your present employer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you see a good future for yourself in your present job?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Use your answers to these questions to help you determine the fit between you and your work. How many times do you check off "No" as your answer?

1. From your answers to the questions on the previous page, do you seem to be well matched to your job?
2. Have your "Yes" and "No" answers helped you understand where the fit is a good one and where it isn't?

Common sources of job stress

Here are some common sources of stress on the job. Check all items that are major sources of stress for you:

Questions	Yes	No
I have too much to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have enough to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There's not enough time for me to get my work done.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The work is too difficult.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The work isn't challenging enough.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometimes I don't understand my assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are too many changes at work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm afraid I'm going to lose my job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a hard time saying "no" even if I don't have the time to take on another task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have too much responsibility.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want more responsibility, but I'm not getting it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It's hard balancing work and home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel my career has stalled.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are a lot of technical and equipment problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questions	Yes	No
It's difficult learning so many new things.		
My boss and I don't get along.		
My co-workers and I don't get along.		
The customers are very demanding.		
I depend on other people for information or materials and they don't help.		
I'm not rewarded for what I do.		
I'm a perfectionist or others might consider me a perfectionist.		
Other		

Looking at your responses above, now answer these questions:

1. Which stressors are the most difficult for you?
2. Do the causes of your different stresses have anything in common?
If so, what are the common factors?
3. Do you react to these stresses in the same or different ways?

My action plan

Writing out a specific plan can help you reduce your major work-related stressors. By defining your goal and sticking with it, you'll become more balanced, productive, and energized.

Briefly describe your work-related stressor or stressors.

Example: There's not enough time for me to get my work done.

My work-related stressor(s):

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Identify how you will manage these stressors more effectively.

What strategies will you put in place?

Example: I will start every day with 15 minutes of planning time. I will set my priorities and concentrate on finishing the most important tasks by the end of each day.

My action plan for effectively managing my work-related stressor(s):

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Set a timeline

What is your timeframe for meeting this objective?

Example: At the end of two weeks, I will be consistently dedicating the first 15 minutes to planning my day.

My timeline:

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Barriers

What barriers might get in the way? How will you overcome them?

Example: I might get sidetracked in the morning and not be able to meet my daily goal of taking 15 minutes in the morning to plan.

Solution: I will not check email until I've planned my day.

My barriers and how I'll overcome them:

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Research shows that employees who have good friends at work find their work to be more enjoyable and satisfying.

Chapter 5

Stress in your relationships

Relationship stress comes in many forms and from a variety of sources. It may be the result of lack of trust or respect, competition, unmet expectations, differences in how people see things, communication problems, or other issues.

Stress in our relationships affects our overall sense of well-being and our levels of stress, whether it's stress we may be experiencing with someone at work, our partner, a child, sibling, or friend. Negative interactions with your partner, for example, can cause blood pressure to rise as well as immediate changes in stress-sensitive hormones, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

We can't change the people with whom we interact every day or control their behavior. What we can control is how we react to others in our personal and work lives. We can reduce the stress in our lives and our relationships by using the stress-reducing strategies covered here.

Tips for dealing with stress in your relationships

- **Take personal responsibility for how you interact with others.** What can you do to help make your relationships work positively for you as you interact with others? Are there times when you're angry about something in your own life and you take your anger out on others?
- **Try hard to understand the other person's point of view.** Ask questions. Listen attentively. Be willing to compromise.
- **Deal effectively with conflict.** How you handle conflict affects your relationships, your well-being, and your levels of stress. It's important to know how to resolve conflicts when they occur and what to do if you can't resolve a conflict with someone. Here are three reminders:
(1) Make an effort to understand the cause of the conflict. (2) Consider solutions and ways to resolve a conflict, including some compromises, before you speak to the other person. (3) Stay calm.
- **Stay in control of your emotions.** Walk away if you are angry, before losing your temper. If you are feeling angry, take a break. Count to 10 silently, or remove yourself from the situation until you feel calm.
- **Get help if you have continual conflicts that you can't solve on your own.** Depending on the conflicts, you may want to get help from a counselor, or a trusted friend, relative, or mentor. Your EAP, LifeWorks, can also provide resources and support.
- **Work at building positive and strong relationships.** Healthy relationships support us through hard times. They're good for our physical and emotional well-being.

Managing your emotions

Here are seven suggestions to help you effectively manage a stressful relationship, whether it is personal or professional:

1. Describe the difficult relationship and the stress reactions it triggers in you.
2. Set your goal. Write down exactly what you will do to reduce the stress you experience. Keep in mind that you may not be able to change the other person's behavior. (Example: Attempt not to argue; walk away before I start to get angry.)
3. Identify potential barriers. Describe what obstacles may limit your effectiveness in dealing with this person.
4. Describe some ways you could overcome these obstacles.
5. Identify where you might seek support to help you handle this difficult relationship. Who could help you?
6. Track your success. Describe how you are managing your relationship with this person more effectively. (Example: Not feeling so stressed when around the person.)
7. Reward yourself. Write down how you will reward yourself for bringing about positive change in this relationship.

Why is this exercise worth doing? Experts agree that positive relationships help us weather hardship, reduce stress, and feel better overall.

Chapter 6

Stress and change

When change takes place in our lives, whether it's personal change or change in the workplace, it can create the opportunity for personal and career growth. It opens us to new ideas, new skills, and new knowledge. It invites us to stretch our capacity to handle new and different situations.

But change also creates uncertainty. Dealing with complex changes, learning new information and skills, and adjusting to new situations expose our vulnerabilities. We may feel uncomfortable and wonder: Will I succeed?

Your challenge is to become proficient at managing change and to make adjustments within yourself to keep up with change—or even stay ahead of it. By becoming an effective change master, you will also be controlling the stress associated with change.

Our lives are constantly changing. Children grow up and leave home. Couples split up. People lose jobs. We may face unforeseen financial difficulties.

Change can make us feel off balance and bring on feelings of stress. Even though there are many aspects of change that we can't control, it is possible to control our reactions to change.

Managing your reactions to change

Fear, anger, frustration, sadness, anxiety—these are all normal reactions to change. While these reactions may alternate with feelings of optimism and

hope for the future, they are still unsettling and can cause us to feel stressed.

Let's look at what a typical change-related stressor might look like.

The stressor: Anxiety about the unknown and self-doubt

What you experience

I'm anxious that I won't be able to handle the change I am facing. I have no idea what's going to happen.

Suggestions

- Ask questions and learn everything you can about the change.
- Look at the aspects of the change that might benefit you.
- Accept that there will be aspects of the change that you may not understand for a while.
- Focus on your strengths, skills, and knowledge.
- Develop new skills and expertise as quickly as possible.
- Connect with others who have gone through similar changes.

As you think about the changes you may be experiencing that are causing you stress, try to identify each emotional reaction you are feeling. Then write down suggestions for how you might effectively manage those reactions.

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Change can be both physically and mentally stressful. As a rule, the larger the change, the more stress you may face. Many people find it particularly difficult to move from one major stage of life to another—for example, to adjust to leaving school, having a child, becoming a stepparent, or retiring.

Because change can be stressful, it's important to be aware of the signs of stress in yourself when you are going through a change. These were described on [pages 8–11](#). Also be sure to practice the stress-reduction strategies described throughout this workbook. Remember to take care of your physical and emotional health. Seek support from family and friends. And don't be afraid to reach out to a professional if you are struggling.



Chapter 7

Stress and time management

When we don't manage the time demands of our jobs and our personal lives as effectively as we can, stress can pile up. Fortunately, there are routines and strategies that can help make better time management a habit.

Four key factors influence how we use our time:

- The amount of control we have over our time
- Whether we make the best choices in our use of time
- How well we organize ourselves at work and at home
- How much we can eliminate time-wasting activities at work and at home

The following exercises can help you understand how these factors can work for or against you, and how to start making changes in your habits.

The demands on your time

You can get a clearer understanding of the demands on your time if you answer these questions:

1. How many hours a week do you work?
2. Is your job fast-paced or more moderate in tempo?
3. How much control do you have over your time?
4. Do you often multitask?
5. Do the time demands of your job feel manageable or are you constantly trying to catch up?

6. Are the time demands of your home life manageable or are you constantly trying to catch up?
7. What time-related issues are the most stressful for you?
8. Are you getting better at managing time, or have you found that your capacity to manage time has not improved much over the years?
9. Do you set aside some uninterrupted time to focus on important projects you need to do for work or at home?
10. Are there time-wasters that keep you from getting things done? If so, what are they? (Examples: Spending time on social media, shopping online instead of doing chores.)

The most common sources of time stress

The most common sources of time stress for many people are:

- having too much to do
- working too many hours
- not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything
- constant pressure or crises at home or at work
- having to meet deadlines that are unrealistic
- not being able to get things done due to interruptions

Suggestions for managing common sources of time stress

- Prioritize your most important activities.
- Ask for suggestions or support from others—ask family, co-workers, or others how they handle the kinds of pressures you are facing.
- Delegate or outsource.
- Space out your tasks instead of waiting until the last minute to get things done.
- Eliminate time-wasting or delaying habits like spending time online when you should be getting things done.
- Take periodic breaks to recharge.
- Keep a shared calendar at home so everyone is clear on personal, work, and family commitments, and knows what others are doing. Open communication can greatly reduce time stress.
- “Divide and conquer” when it comes to personal and family obligations such as chores, child care, etc.
- Manage your expectations of yourself and others.
- Accept that doing everything perfectly isn’t always necessary—or possible.
- Learn how best to prioritize, compromise, and negotiate among the various roles in your life.
- Set aside focused time to get work done and ask others not to disturb you.
- Draw up a plan with action steps.
- Track your progress toward meeting your goals.

Time-management exercise

This exercise will help you look at and understand how you manage your time—at home, at work, and with others. Check off which behaviors best describe you. Be honest.

When organizing my work, I:

Prioritize my work and plan my daily work activities.

Use a “to-do” list or calendar to help structure my workday.

Dive in to my workday without a plan.

Take a “wing it” approach.

When faced with a deadline, I:

Set personal deadlines for completing what I have to do.

Respect deadlines and meet them.

Tend to procrastinate and do things at the last minute.

Sometimes miss deadlines.

When handling crises or the unexpected in my personal or work life, I:

Tend to handle things well.

Ask for help if I need it.

Tend to get overwhelmed.

Rarely ask for help.

When making decisions, I:

Take an organized approach to determining what to do and then decide.

Learn from past decisions and choose appropriately.

Can be indecisive because I’m not sure what to do.

Second-guess myself and past decisions.

Review your results

1. How productive or unproductive are your time habits?
2. In what ways do you manage your work time in a positive and productive manner?
3. In what ways are you less productive with time?
4. What changes could you make to feel more in control of your time?

Putting it all together: My action plan

Review the exercises that you completed in this section and the issues that are causing you stress.

Identify your target areas

List the areas that you would like to target for change.

Examples: Reduce time-wasting activities like going on social media. Ask for more help at home from my partner to free up time.

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Plan for barriers

List barriers that might make it difficult for you to manage each of the time challenges and how you might overcome them.

Examples: Not being aware of the ways that I waste time when I'm supposed to be doing other things. Not being clear enough in my communication with my partner about sharing household chores.

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Reaching your goals

Define one or two time-management goals that you plan to accomplish.

Choose a definite start date within the next month.

Make sure your goals are realistic, specific, and measurable.

Examples: This week, I will begin to monitor my personal use of social media; I will limit it to 15 minutes a day.

Record your goals in your phone or calendar to remind yourself and keep yourself motivated.

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Reward yourself

When you achieve your goals, celebrate your success. Reward yourself every step of the way. Recognizing your small successes will build your confidence and motivation.

Chapter 8

Small steps can make a big difference

You are on your way to developing positive strategies to help manage stress.

You might decide to focus on the stresses in your personal life, or your work life, or both. You might find that adopting more productive time-management skills will help you alleviate stress in all areas of your life.

As you work toward your goals, it's important to know that every positive step you take will help you get there. By breaking the process into manageable pieces, and taking them on one at a time, you'll begin to achieve your larger goals.

So start small and increase your goals at a pace that feels right for you. Before you realize it, you will have adopted positive new habits that we hope will leave you feeling healthier, less stressed, and more in control of your life.

