

Self-Care and Stress Management*

Do your best to attend to your physical health and consider the following:

Try to be physically active, ideally several times each week, taking part in activities you enjoy.

Try walking or running, if there are places where you can maintain a safe distance between yourself and others. (If not, try exercising early or late in the day, or choosing less sought-after routes, if you can do so safely.) You can also do push-ups or sit-ups at home, dancing, or anything else you enjoy. Many workouts are available online or on television—and many do not require payment or equipment.

Strive to sleep and eat well. If possible, get enough sleep or at least rest. Aim for 7 to 9 hours a night. Do your best to eat healthy food. Drink enough fluids to stay hydrated.

Try to avoid increasing use of alcohol and other drugs. Although substances may help feelings seem more manageable in the short term, they can also lead to dependence and keep you from addressing issues over which you have control.

Also key to health and resilience is maintenance of your support networks. Try to remember to do the following:

Stay in contact with loved ones, including family and friends. Although social distancing orders mean that many of us cannot be together in person, several online meeting platforms allow you to talk remotely with loved ones. Phone calls are helpful as well. You can also send letters and postcards to family members and friends.

Following are ideas for activities that may help you reduce stress and relax, process your experience, and reconnect to your values and priorities:

Visualization. Imagine that you are in a place that is peaceful and calming to you—a place you have been, or one where you would like to be. You may want to write a description of this place, record yourself reading what you have written, and then listen to the recording as a way to relax. Also, many visualization and guided imagery scripts and videos for relaxation are available online, as are apps and podcasts.

Progressive muscle relaxation. One sign of stress is tense muscles, which is why stress can lead to headaches, backaches, and exhaustion. Progressive muscle relaxation is a systematic way to relax your muscles.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation—Instructions:

1. Get into a comfortable position.
2. Choose a muscle group (e.g., muscles in your feet or lower legs).
3. Breathe in and tighten the muscles in the group for 5 to 10 seconds.
4. Breathe out and release the muscles suddenly. Relax for at least 10 seconds.
5. Repeat the process with another muscle group. It often helps to progress from head to toe or vice versa.

Mindful movement such as yoga or tai chi. In addition to offering the health benefits of other exercise, yoga and tai chi may help with stress management. Along with the many centers offering classes online, videos are available online to use as guidance.

Meditation. Meditation has many benefits, including reduced anxiety, depression, and blood pressure, as well as insomnia relief. A session can be as short as a few minutes. You can access classes that many centers and institutes are offering online, sometimes free of charge. A host of mobile apps can be used to start or strengthen a meditation habit.

Breathing exercises. When experiencing stress and strong emotions, people often constrain their breathing, and breathing exercises can be an effective way to relax. You can try deep breathing, or breathing into and out of your abdominal area instead of from your chest. Imagine your breath going into and out of your belly as you breathe. Another option is the 4–7–8 technique.

The 4–7–8 Breathing Technique for Relaxation

1. Sit quietly, relax, and close your eyes. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge on the roof of your mouth just behind your top front teeth. Your tongue should remain in this position throughout the exercise.
2. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whooshing sound. It may help to purse your lips.
3. Close your mouth, and inhale quietly through your nose for a count of four.
4. Now hold your breath for a count of seven.
5. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whooshing sound, to a count of eight.
6. Repeat steps 2–5 three times, for a total of four breaths.

In this technique, exhalation should take twice as long as inhalation. This ratio is the important part; the exact amount of time you spend on each phase is not important.

Humor. Humor and laughter can help relieve stress and, if shared, build bonds between people. Seek out sources of humor that have made you laugh in the past, such as specific cartoonists and authors, satirical publications and news shows, stand-up comedians, and television and movie comedies.

Journal writing or drawing. Write or draw in a journal if you find it helpful. This can be on paper, on a computer, or in an app. It can be as minimal as writing down one or two things you are grateful for a few times each week, or things you are pleased that you have accomplished.

Spiritual and religious practices. Some congregations and spiritual organizations are now offering online, live-streamed services and observances. Some are archiving services online. Participation in a religious or spiritual group can be helpful for meaning-making, reflection, and connection with a community. adequate staff, one step you can take to reduce staff stress is to schedule employees so that they

* Adapted from <https://www.samhsa.gov/>