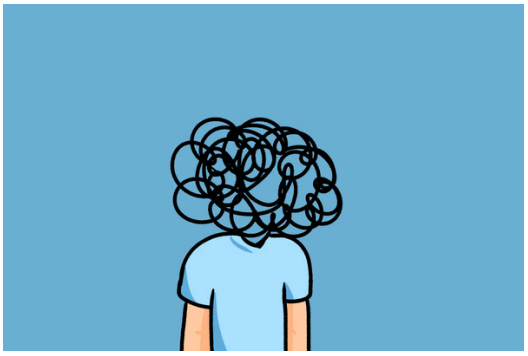
A Lifestyle Medicine Approach to Stress



Stress is a normal physical and emotional response to demands or challenges. While short-term stress can be helpful, ongoing or excessive stress can affect both mental and physical wellbeing, contributing to symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, low mood, fatigue, muscle tension and trouble concentrating.

The good news is that simple lifestyle changes can help manage stress and support your overall health, as detailed below.

Make healthy food choices

Food choices and stress are closely linked. A balanced diet that includes plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats can help support steady energy levels and a more stable mood throughout the day.



Limiting caffeine, alcohol and high-sugar foods may also help some people manage stress more effectively, as these can contribute to energy crashes, disrupted sleep and heightened anxiety.[1]

Stress thrives when we don't sleep

Poor sleep can make stress feel harder to manage. When we are sleep-deprived, the body produces more stress hormones and finds it more difficult to regulate emotions, leaving us less equipped to handle everyday pressures.[2]

Good-quality sleep, on the other hand, supports mood, concentration and resilience. To improve your sleep, try keeping a regular bedtime, making your room cool and dark, avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the evening, and building a calming wind-down routine before bed.

Help your body recover

Nicotine, vaping and alcohol can disrupt sleep and mood, making stress harder to manage. These substances may increase tension, reduce sleep quality and leave the body less able to recover from daily pressures.[3]

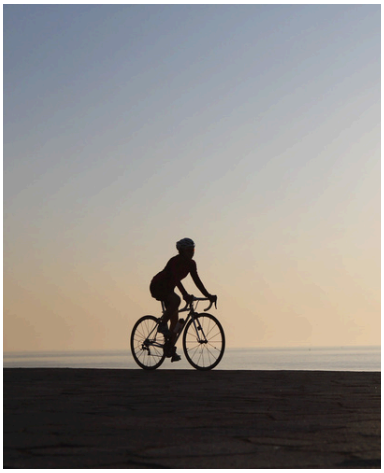
Adopting healthier routines, such as reducing or avoiding these substances, can help support calmer stress levels and improve overall resilience.

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Consistent movement helps



Regular physical activity can help lower stress by reducing levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, while stimulating the production of endorphins, which improve mood naturally. Exercise also supports better sleep quality and can make daily pressures feel more manageable over time.

Even small amounts of movement, such as a short walk, stretching or gentle cycling, can help relieve tension and promote a sense of calm. Aim to be active regularly, as the benefits for stress management build with consistency rather than intensity.[4]

Meditation, mindfulness and the great outdoors

Meditation and mindfulness are effective tools for managing stress. Regular practice can help calm the mind, reduce racing thoughts and lower the body's stress response. Even a few minutes of focused breathing or guided meditation each day may improve emotional regulation and promote a greater sense of calm.[5] Writing in a daily gratitude journal can help.

Spending time outdoors can also support stress management.[6] Being in natural environments has been shown to help reduce tension, improve mood and lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Whether it is a walk in a park, time by water or simply sitting in a garden, contact with nature may make stress feel easier to manage.

Social connection can ease stress

Maintaining healthy relationships and staying socially connected can help reduce the impact of stress on both mental and physical health. Having people to talk to may reduce feelings of isolation, provide emotional reassurance and make everyday pressures feel less overwhelming.



Spending time with friends, family, support groups or community networks can offer encouragement, practical help and a sense of belonging. Supportive relationships make stress feel easier to manage and can improve overall resilience during difficult times.

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