

Stress Management & Healthy Living

Source Material: [Stress \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int)

[Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)

[APA PsycNet FullTextHTML page](#)



Why We Feel Stress:

- **Stress** – “a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation.”
 - Natural human response which prompts us to address challenges and threats.
- Stress is a natural and expected part of life.
 - Stress feels uncomfortable in the moment, but serves to alert us to danger, conflict, or unmet needs.
- Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.
 - Coping styles and symptoms of stress vary from person to person.

Discussion:

- What are some of our biggest sources of stress in life?
- How do we know when we are feeling stressed?
- How do we typically react to stress?
- What coping skills do we tend to use to handle stressful situations?

Symptoms of Stress:

- When stressed, we may experience:
 - Difficulty concentrating.
 - Changes in appetite.
 - Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Stress can exacerbate mental health conditions:
 - Commonly increases feelings of depression and anxiety.
 - Symptoms of stress which affect daily functioning may compound the effects of pre-existing mental health conditions.
- For many, signs of stress reduce over time as the situation improves or as they learn to cope emotionally with the situation.
 - Stress tends to be more widespread during events such as major economic crises, disease outbreaks, natural disasters, war, and community violence.



[How to protect your brain from stress | Niki Korteweg | TEDxAmsterdamWomen](#)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress** – Trauma-related symptoms resulting from exposure to the traumatic experiences of others.
 - Can present in people who witness traumatic events or care for trauma survivors.
 - Common in helping professions; some call STS a “natural consequence of caring.”
 - Similar to stress and trauma, STS can affect many areas of one’s life including physical and mental health, professional performance, interpersonal interactions, cognitive ability and emotional well-being.
 - Similar symptoms to PTSD; STS can result in avoidant coping mechanisms.
- **Compassion Fatigue** – condition characterized by symptoms of burnout as well as STS.
 - **Burnout** – “physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes toward oneself and others.”
 - Results from performing at a high level until stress and exhaustion take their toll.
- **Coping style impacts how we process STS:**

1.) Problem-Focused Coping:

- Approach-oriented coping mechanisms:
 - Planning, active coping, suppression of competing activities, positive reinterpretation and growth.
 - Focus on analyzing the source of stress as well as the means of managing the problem.
- Problem-focused coping is primarily correlated with:
 - Less-severe symptoms of avoidance
 - Lower negative alterations in cognition, mood, and reactivity (NACMR).

2.) *Socially-Supported Emotion-Focused Coping:*

- Instrumental social support, emotional social support, venting.
 - Focus on expressing the distressing emotions and relying on available social supports.
- *No significant findings on the predictability of STS symptoms* were observed through socially-supported emotion-focused coping.
 - Venting of emotions was found to be positively associated with higher negative alterations in cognition, mood, and reactivity (NACMR) as well as intrusive thoughts.
 - Seeking instrumental social support was inversely correlated with avoidant symptoms.
 - Findings not significant enough to denote predictive factor for STS symptoms.

3.) Avoidant Coping:

- Denial, behavioral, mental disengagement.
 - Withdrawal from stressors and/or associated emotions.
- Only coping style which found any association with intrusive thoughts.
- Positively predicts negative alterations in cognition, mood, and reactivity (NACMR)
 - Withdrawing from stress or associated feelings can be predictive of NACMR
 - Avoidant coping may increase susceptibility to secondary traumatic stress as a result.

4.) Passive/Indirect Coping:

- Acceptance, humor, restraint, substance use.
 - Lacks directed action toward dealing with the problem or the emotions induced by it.
 - Substance use proved to be the most prominent risk factor associated with symptoms of STS.
- Passive/indirect coping is the most prominent predictor of:
 - Negative alterations in cognition, mood, and reactivity (NACMR)
 - STS-related avoidance symptoms.

Stress Prevention:

- ***Keep a daily routine:***

- Consistent schedules can help use our time efficiently and to feel more in control of our lives.

- ***Get plenty of sleep:***

- Consistent, restful sleep recharges the body and allows the mind to rest.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, alcohol, and use of electronic devices before bed.
- Allow for enough time to prepare for sleep and to wake up the following day.

- ***Connect with others:***

- Keep in touch with friends/family and share concerns/feelings with people you trust.
- Social groups (church, family, friend groups, coworkers, etc.) can be helpful for problem-solving and in fulfilling our senses of security and social belonging.

- ***Eat healthy:***

- Ensure balanced diet with enough fuel and nutrients to support our daily activities.

- ***Exercise regularly:***

- Fortify & maintain one's physical body while releasing stress chemicals through exercise.

- ***Limit time following news/social media:***

- These are common causes of stress over which we have little or no control.
- Avoiding unnecessary triggers can reduce stress and improve overall outlook.

Managing Stress in the Moment:

- ***Stop, think, & relax:***

- Separate from stressor; prevent escalation of stress.
- Consider what we are feeling & what could be the cause.
- Relaxation, deep-breathing, physical exercise, connecting with others, connecting with nature.

- ***Practice mindfulness:***

- Identify what we have control to change.
- Accept what we have no control to change.
- Practice living “in the moment” without stressing about future responsibilities or past experiences.

- ***Focus on problem-solving:***

- Brainstorm solutions for problems we encounter.
- Seek insight, guidance, and support from others we trust in our lives.
- Try new solutions; continue what works, stop doing what does not work.



Recap of Stress Management:

- ***Stress is a natural reaction to danger, including threats & unmet needs.***
 - Our reactions to feelings of stress affect how we manage & process stress.
 - Focusing on problem-solving in areas which are within our control can be effective in managing feelings of stress.
- ***Structure & routine self-care can be effective tools for managing stress.***
 - We must first care for ourselves to be able to care for others.
 - Routines through which we tend to all of our needs can reduce feelings of stress.
- ***Stress, at times, is unavoidable.***
 - Unexpected events in life may cause feelings of stress.
 - Being familiar with personally-effective coping skills/techniques is important for managing day-to-day feelings of stress.
 - Maintain social support group containing several trusted individuals to whom we can turn in times of high stress or conflict.
 - Friends, family, neighbors, church members, trusted professionals, counselor, etc.

Closing Discussion:

- How do we feel about managing stress following this presentation?
- What are some stress-relief techniques which you find personally helpful?
- Describe a stressful situation which we may potentially encounter; How could we manage our stress within this situation?
- Do we feel this presentation has been effective?
 - Are there improvements we could make or any additional information which would be useful to include in this presentation?