

## Diet and Exercise as Stress-reducers

Stress can take a tremendous physical toll on the body. It causes fatigue, tension, nervousness and loss of appetite. But you can control the effects of stress on your body through simple changes in your diet, exercise regimen and general outlook on your daily activities.

### Diet

Stress affects people's diets in different ways. Some people experience a loss in appetite. Others overindulge in unhealthy foods, caffeine or tobacco as a defense against stress. Either of these reactions can be detrimental to your health, so take steps to avoid exaggerating the effects of stress with your diet:

- Avoid foods that are high in fat or contain large amounts of sugar or salt. A diet that consists largely of fat, sugar and salt can lead to high-blood pressure and increase tension.
- Avoid cigarettes and other tobacco products. Smoking is one of the most preventable causes of illness and death, and its impact on the body can only worsen stress levels.
- Eat sensible meals on a regular schedule, especially breakfast. Maintaining a well-balanced, nutritious daily diet increases your energy level and ability to deal with potentially stressful situations.

### Exercise

Proper exercise not only helps you maintain your general physical well-being, it also provides a much-needed break from the stressors in your life. Use these tips to fight stress by introducing regular exercise into your routine:

- When you feel stressed, take a break and go for a long walk, if possible.
- Schedule time each day for workouts, and place as much priority on them as you would your other commitments. Your workout routine must become a set part of your day; otherwise, it will be too tempting to avoid exercise.
- If possible, walk or ride a bike. If you must drive or take public transportation, use the stairs whenever possible to get that extra bit of exercise.
- Plan fun, physically challenging activities with friends or coworkers. This will help you set exercise goals and give you something to look forward to.

### Positive Outlook

Try to keep a positive outlook. Studies show that optimistic people are more mentally and physically healthy than those who take a negative approach. When you see difficult situations as things that can be managed instead of insurmountable obstacles, you are more likely to solve the problems quickly and avoid stress.

Stress is a normal part of life. The most important thing you can do is acknowledge its place in your life and refuse to let it beat you.

## Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Coping with Stress: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- ChooseMyPlate.gov: [www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/)
- Nutrition.gov: [www.nutrition.gov/](http://www.nutrition.gov/)

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