

Relieving Stress and Anxiety

Sometimes, your emotions can trigger physical responses and impulses in your body. For example, if you are nervous, you may feel your hands start to shake or sweat. Instead of focusing on getting rid of your anxiety and the physical responses that accompany it, try accepting them as they arise.

How Stress Affects the Body

Emotional stress often causes tension or discomfort in the forehead, temples, neck, throat, jaw, shoulders, chest or abdomen. Most people feel one (or a combination) of these symptoms when they are stressed, while others experience numbness. Sometimes, trying to ignore or push aside these feelings can make them feel even worse. Instead of thinking about sweaty palms, shaking hands, stiff shoulders, a tight throat, or a quick heart rate as weaknesses, think of them as natural responses to your feelings.

Developing Mindfulness

When you experience pain or discomfort, take a minute to focus on it and ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I feel uncomfortable?
- What does it feel like?
- Does it have a certain shape?
- Does it move or stay in one place?

Inhale deeply and acknowledge your discomfort and its characteristics. Accept how you are feeling and take ten slow, deep breaths. Recognise that the emotional discomfort you are experiencing is fleeting and that your body is simply responding to stress. Imagine your discomfort expanding and contracting as you breathe. As you continue with your day, allow yourself the space to embrace any uncomfortable feelings you may experience. Accepting your emotional discomfort as it arises can help alleviate some of the anxiety and tension linked to the physical symptoms of stress.

It is important to remember that being uncomfortable is not a weakness. Just as laughter is a response to humour, discomfort is a response to stress. Both laughter and discomfort are natural responses to emotions.

Bear in mind that it is natural for physical symptoms of stress to come and go. Understanding that feelings of discomfort are temporary reactions to stress will enable you to lead a healthy and fulfilling life.

Staying Calm

Reducing and managing stress and anxiety levels requires consistent practice. Bear the following tips in mind to help you:

- **Talk about your feelings.** A good way to alleviate fear is to discuss it. Chat with a friend or family member, or take advantage of the help available through your Employee Assistance Programme.
- **Focus on what is important.** Engaging in play with your children, for instance, is far more beneficial than consuming all the news about the world's troubles. Focus your energy on what is important to you.
- **Decide what you can and cannot control.** While it's wise to be mindful of your surroundings and current events, fixating on things beyond your control can be harmful.
- **Reduce your stress.** Incorporate basic stress-reducing activities into your routine, such as exercising and enjoying leisure pursuits like watching a film or reading a book.
- **Carry on with your daily life.** Disruptions caused by excessive worry will only increase stress levels for yourself and those around you. Try to stick to your routine as much as possible.
- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** Physical health plays a key role in keeping your mental health stable.
- **Seek professional help.** If you're experiencing disruptions to your sleep or eating patterns, consult a professional. Start with your Employee Assistance Programme, which can provide short-term counselling and refer you to resources for more intensive treatment.

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