



Session 16: Manage Your Stress

Stress is part of life. However, you can learn better ways to take care of yourself when faced with stress.

Stress is not always bad. Some stress can make life interesting and exciting (for example births, weddings, a new job).

Too much stress can have a negative effect on your body and mind. It may lead to physical symptoms, high blood glucose levels, or feeling moody (for example, anxious, angry, depressed).

Stress comes in many forms and may be related to:

- Health (pain, chronic medical conditions)
- Basic needs (work, housing, transportation, finances, even the weather, traffic, noise, or crime in your community)
- Social conflicts (fighting with a spouse or partner, children, friends, coworkers, neighbors)
- Emotional troubles (worry, sadness, grief, anger, guilt)

Take a minute to answer these questions:

1. How often do you feel stressed? ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Seldom

2. How do you know you are stressed? What is it like for you?

3. Name some things that are making you feel stressed right now.

4. What are some *unhealthy* ways you deal with stress?

5. What are some *healthy* ways you deal with stress?

Too much stress can make it harder for you to reach and keep a healthy weight or stay physically active. Under stress you may withdraw from healthy activities and go back to old habits.

For example, you may:

- Move less (watch too much TV, play on the computer, sleep more)
- Eat or drink too much (often foods with a lot of fat and sugar or more alcohol)

Instead, use healthy ways to cope with stress. Check the ideas below that you would like to try.

1. Prevent or reduce stress when you can. Are there one two areas you are willing to work on?

- ☐ Practice saying “No.” Say “Yes” only when it is important to *you*.
- ☐ Share some of your work or duties with others.
- ☐ Set goals you can reach.
- ☐ Take charge of your time. Be realistic. Get organized. Make schedules that are likely to work.
- ☐ Use problem solving:
 - Describe the problem in detail.
 - Brainstorm your options.
 - Pick one option to try.
 - Make an action plan.
 - Try it. See how it goes.
- ☐ Plan ahead. Think about the kind of situations that cause stress for you. Plan ways to get little breaks from chronic stress. This may help you cope better over the long run.
- ☐ Keep things in perspective. Think of all the good things in your life. Maintain a positive attitude.
- ☐ Reach out to people.
- ☐ Focus on wellness.
 - Find healthy foods that also comfort you (nutritious snacks, special teas).
 - Get enough sleep.

- Practice ways to relax. Do yoga. Listen to music.
 - Nurture your spiritual health. Many people do so with religious activities, or through art, music or being in nature.
 - Laugh often. Enjoy humor.
- ☐ Re-commit to your physical activity routine. Find something you are willing and able to do. Get started.

2. When you can't prevent stress, try to manage it better. Catch yourself feeling stressed as early as you can. Take a 10-minute "time out."

- ☐ Stand. Stretch. Move those muscles anyway you can.
- ☐ Take care of yourself. Take 10 minutes just for YOURSELF. Water the garden, take a bath or shower, talk to a friend, organize your tools or pictures, read the funnies, walk the dog.
- ☐ Do something that quiets your mind and relaxes your body. Meditate, pray, do yoga, listen to soothing music, practice "belly breathing."
- ☐ Other ideas. _____

Belly breathing is how newborn babies and sleeping adults breathe. The breaths are slow and deep and fill the belly not the chest.

To learn belly breathing:

1. Sit comfortably. Keep your spine straight. Bend your knees, with your feet on the floor about eight inches apart.
2. Put one hand on your belly. Put the other hand on your chest.
 - Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Let your belly push your hand up and out.
 - Gently press down on your belly as you breathe out through your nose.
 - Let your chest move just a little. It should follow the movement of your belly.

Practice belly breathing when you notice yourself getting tense. You can do it sitting down or standing still. Try it in rush hour traffic or while waiting in line.



Manage Sleep to Manage Stress

"Sleep is the best meditation." ~ Dalai Lama

A good night's sleep is as important for your body and mind as eating, drinking, and breathing.

How do you feel when you get *enough* sleep? _____

How do you feel when you get *too little* sleep? _____

How do you feel when you get *too much* sleep? _____

One in three Americans doesn't get enough sleep.

- Many adults say they get less than the recommended 7-9 hours.
- Only one in five adults say their sleep is good or excellent.
- Poor sleep makes it harder to cope with stress, which further disturbs sleep, leading to a bad cycle.
- Poor sleep increases risk for (and makes it harder to manage):
 - Obesity (sleep helps balance hormones that affect metabolism, appetite, and weight). This may lead to sleep apnea and a slippery slope of health decline.
 - Pre-diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Depression

Sleep problems steal your energy and make it harder to work on your eating and physical activity habits during the day.

Start by taking a close look at your sleep habits and patterns. Is there room for improvement?

Not everyone needs the same number of hours. What is your ideal "sleep number"? _____.

Track your sleep this week and see what amount helps you feel your best.



Tips for Getting Better Sleep

Think about behaviors related to sleep and bedtime that you might be able to change. **Check one or two that you can try.**

- ☐ Be active. Regular physical activity helps many people fall asleep faster, sleep longer, and spend less time awake during the night.
- ☐ Use routines that help you relax each night before bed.
- ☐ Don't go to bed unless you are sleepy.
- ☐ Turn off all electronics before getting in bed. Even better, keep them all out of the bedroom.
- ☐ If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, then get out of bed. Do something relaxing in another room if possible.
- ☐ Go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day.
- ☐ Avoid taking naps. Or keep them short (less than one hour and before 3:00 pm).
- ☐ Avoid large amounts of caffeine.
- ☐ Avoid large amounts of alcohol or nicotine.
- ☐ Do not go to bed hungry or overly full.
- ☐ Avoid sleeping pills, or use them with caution.
- ☐ Make your bedroom quiet, dark, and a little bit cool.

Psychiatric conditions such as major depression, anxiety disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affect sleep in many different ways.

Talk to your health care provider if you want more help. In some cases, a sleep evaluation, behavioral sleep intervention, or medications may be needed.



Laughter is Good Medicine

"With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come." ~William Shakespeare

"Laughter is internal jogging." ~Norman Cousins

Does a laugh a day keep the doctor away? Much more research needs to be done, but more and more experts believe that strong laughter (about 10-15 minutes or more each day) can help:

- ☐ Ease stress
- ☐ Boost your immune system
- ☐ Lower your blood pressure
- ☐ Lift your mood
- ☐ Burn a few calories

Laughter may also help your brain and hormones handle blood sugar. Here is what one Japanese study found:

- People with type 2 diabetes were given a meal to eat. Then they watched a live comedy show. Their blood sugar was measured two hours later.
- At another time, the same people ate the same meal. But afterwards, they listened to a boring lecture. Again, their blood sugar was measured.
- Can you guess what happened? Their blood sugar went up less after watching the comedy show.

Try your own laughter experiments. Look up "Laughter Yoga" on YouTube, watch funny movies, listen to funny radio shows, get together with friends who enjoy laughing and see what happens.



To Do:

Check the boxes when you complete each item:

☐ **Keep track of your weight.**

Weigh yourself once a week. Record your weight

☐ **Record what you eat and drink** using your preferred method. Come as close as you can to your calorie and fat gram goals.

☐ Record your physical activity and keep track of the minutes you are active.

- Be physically active for at least 150 minutes per week. If you are active for more, great work and keep it up.
- If you are active for less, that is okay. Start by adding 30 minutes more.

☐ Practice ways to prevent or reduce stress (pages 2 and 3). Did it work? _____

☐ Practice relaxation techniques at home and/or at your worksite. Find what works best for you. _____

☐ Find your best sleep number. Monitor and track your sleep hours. What did you learn? _____

☐ Try adding more laughter to your life. Did you notice a difference in how you feel? _____

☐ To become more aware of how much time you spend sitting, **fill in the 7-Day Sitting Diary for one week** (see next page). Have it ready for your next session.



7-Day Sitting Diary

What's in Your Week?

Do you really know how much time you spend sitting? There is no better way to find out than for you to keep track of it.

For one week, please keep track of your sitting time by filling in this **7-Day Sitting Diary** (see next page).

Write the abbreviation for the day of the week below each numbered day.

Shade in each 30-minute block in which more than 15 minutes was spent sitting (exclude sleep time).

You may want to use different colors to track job sitting (black) versus non-job sitting (red).

Start date _____

End date _____

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
12:00AM							
12:30AM							
1:00AM							
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