



Stress and Anxiety, and How to Manage

There's a thin line between stress and anxiety. Both are emotional reactions, but stress is normally caused by an external stimulus. This stimulus can be temporary like a work due date or a disagreement with a loved one, or long-term, such as being unable to work, discrimination or chronic illness. People who are stressed go through both mental and physical signs, such as short temper, tiredness, muscle discomfort, digestive problems and difficulty sleeping.

In comparison, anxiety is defined by persistent, extreme worries that are still there even when the stressor is gone. Anxiety can bring on the same set of symptoms as stress: sleeplessness, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, muscle tension and irritability.

No matter the cause, it can be hard to cope with life's pressures. From relaxation exercises and lifestyle changes to professional counseling and support, you can take steps to find relief and start living a healthier, happier life with the right approach.

Exercise Relieves Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety can be overwhelming, and many people look for ways to cope. Fortunately, exercise is a powerful tool for managing stress and anxiety. Just a few minutes of exercise each day can release endorphins, and help you feel more relaxed and in control. Whether it's yoga in the morning, a swim in the afternoon or a brisk walk in the evening, regular exercise can help improve your mood and give you a sense of calm. Exercise also increases your energy levels and helps clear your mind, allowing you to focus more on the task.

Reduce Screen Time

In today's world, it can be difficult to disconnect from our phones. We rely on them for work, school, communication and entertainment. However, reducing phone time can help reduce stress and anxiety. Studies have shown that too much time spent on our phones can lead to sleep deprivation, fatigue and even depression. By taking a break from our mobile devices, we give ourselves a chance to recharge and relax.

Making a conscious effort to reduce phone time helps us focus more on the present moment and mindfully engage with our environment. It can also help reduce distractions, and create a more peaceful and calming atmosphere. So, if you're feeling overwhelmed and stressed, try taking a break from the digital world and exploring the world around you. It can make a world of difference!



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Practice self-care. Setting aside time to practice self-care may help reduce your stress levels.



Reading (or listening to) a good book



Stretching before bed



Taking a bath



Lighting candles



Getting a massage

Spend Time with Friends

Spending time with your friends is one of the best ways to relieve stress. Whether going for a walk together, attending game night or having a good laugh, being with the people you love can put you in a much better mood. Friends are like a support system — always there to listen and provide a fresh perspective on whatever is causing your stress. When you're with them, you can take a break from your worries and enjoy the moment. And that's not all — research has shown that when we're around people we care about, our bodies are flooded with feel-good hormones like oxytocin and serotonin, leading to a sense of calm and well-being.

Create Boundaries and Learn to Say “No”

Setting boundaries and learning to say “no” are essential for reducing stress and maintaining good mental health. When we create boundaries, we protect ourselves from being overwhelmed by too many commitments. It's also important to say “no” when we feel like we can't handle something. It's OK to say “no,” even if it seems like it might disappoint someone. It's critical to take care of yourself first. Saying “no” more often can free up more time for you to focus on the things that are important to you. It also helps to set limits on how much you're willing to do or how often you're willing to be available. Learning to create boundaries and say “no” can be difficult at first, but it's well worth it.

Practice Mindfulness

If you're struggling with anxiety, one of the most effective things you can do is to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment, focusing on the “here and now” rather than worrying about the past or future. It helps to ground us and take us away from our negative thoughts. Studies have shown that consistently practicing mindfulness can reduce anxiety and stress, and help us to better manage our emotions. Mindfulness can take many forms — from meditation and yoga to deep breathing and journaling. Taking time out of each day to focus on our thoughts and feelings can significantly reduce anxiety.

Spend Time in Nature

Spending time in nature is one of the most effective ways to reduce stress. Whether walking through a park, exploring a local forest or simply sitting in the sunshine, being in nature can have a powerful and positive effect on your mental health. The [Forest Preserves of Cook County](#) provides over 350 stress-relieving miles of trails to walk, bike or run. Research has shown that being in nature can help reduce stress, anxiety and depression. It can also help to improve our mood, focus and productivity.

Something to Consider

If you think you may be struggling with stress or anxiety, it's important to talk to your health care provider. Anxiety, stress, and depression can make it difficult to concentrate and function, while making you more susceptible to illness. Your health care team or [Magellan EAP](#) counselor can help identify the type of stress or anxiety you're experiencing and offer suggestions for managing it. And remember, with the right approach, you can find the tools to enjoy a calmer and less stressful life.

