



C.D.P

STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR CSO'S TRAINING COURSE

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What is stress, theory

Everyone experiences stress, and sometimes that stress can feel overwhelming.

Stress is the physical or mental response to an external cause, such as having a lot of homework or having an illness. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can happen repeatedly over a long time. Usually, stress goes away once the situation is resolved. Stress **can be positive or negative**. For example, it may inspire you to meet a deadline, or it may cause you to lose sleep. Stress can affect your mind and body. You may experience symptoms such as: Excessive worry, Uneasiness, Tension, Headaches or body pain, High blood pressure, Loss of sleep.

It's important to manage your stress.

Stress is typically **caused by an external trigger**. The trigger can be **short-term**, such as a work deadline or a fight with a loved one or **long-term**, such as being unable to work, discrimination, or chronic illness. People under stress experience **mental and physical symptoms**, such as irritability, anger, fatigue, muscle pain, digestive troubles, and difficulty sleeping.

Signs of stress: can be rapid heart rates, having headaches, stomach aches, a lack of energy, being irritable, decreased concentration or ability to focus, body aches and pains, or weight gain or weight loss. It's important to recognize your emotions and how your body feels to know what you're feeling and why you're feeling that way. Sometimes just admitting that a situation is stressful and being prepared to deal with it can be healing.

Stress and Health and Body

Stress affects all systems of the body including the musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal, nervous, and reproductive systems. Our bodies are well equipped to handle stress in small doses, but when that stress becomes long-term or chronic, it can have serious effects on your body.

Musculoskeletal system: When the body is stressed, muscles tense up. Muscle tension is almost a reflex reaction to stress—the body's way of guarding against injury and pain. With sudden onset stress, the muscles tense up all at once, and then release their tension when the stress passes. Chronic stress causes the muscles in the body to be in a more or less constant state of guardedness. When muscles are taut and tense for long periods of time, this may trigger other reactions of the body and even promote stress-related disorders. For example, tension-type headache and migraine headache are associated with chronic muscle tension in the area of the shoulders, neck and head. Musculoskeletal pain in the low back and upper extremities has also been linked to stress, especially job stress. Millions of individuals suffer from chronic painful conditions secondary to musculoskeletal disorders. Muscle tension promotes chronic, stress-

related musculoskeletal conditions. **Relaxation techniques** and other stress-relieving activities and therapies have been shown to effectively reduce muscle tension, decrease the incidence of certain stress-related disorders, such as headache, and increase a sense of well-being. For those who develop chronic pain conditions, stress-relieving activities have been shown to improve mood and daily function.

Respiratory system: The respiratory system supplies oxygen to cells and removes carbon dioxide waste from the body. Stress and strong emotions can present with respiratory symptoms, such as shortness of breath and rapid breathing, as the airway between the nose and the lungs constricts. Psychological stressors can exacerbate breathing problems for people with pre-existing respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Some studies show that an acute stress—such as the death of a loved one—can actually trigger asthma attacks. In addition, the rapid breathing—or hyperventilation—caused by stress can bring on a panic attack in someone prone to panic attacks. Working with a psychologist to develop **relaxation, breathing, and other cognitive behavioral strategies** can help.

Cardiovascular system: Acute stress—stress that is momentary or short-term such as meeting deadlines, being stuck in traffic or suddenly slamming on the brakes to avoid an accident—causes an increase in heart rate and stronger contractions of the heart muscle, with the stress hormones—adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol—acting as messengers for these effects. In addition, the blood vessels can increase the blood pressure. This is also known as the **fight or flight response**. Once the **acute stress** episode has passed, the body returns to its normal state. **Chronic stress**, or a constant stress experienced over a prolonged period of time, can contribute to long-term problems for heart and blood vessels. The consistent and ongoing increase in heart rate, and the elevated levels of **stress hormones** and of blood pressure, can take a toll on the body. This long-term ongoing stress can increase the risk for hypertension, heart attack, or stroke. **Repeated acute stress and persistent chronic stress** may also contribute to inflammation in the circulatory system, particularly in the coronary arteries, and this is one pathway that is thought to tie stress to heart attack.

The risk for heart disease associated with stress appears to **differ for women**, depending on whether the woman is premenopausal or postmenopausal. **Levels of estrogen** in premenopausal women appears to help blood vessels respond better during stress, thereby helping their bodies to better handle stress and protecting them against heart disease. Postmenopausal women lose this level of protection due to loss of estrogen, therefore putting them at greater risk for the effects of stress on heart disease.

Endocrine system: When someone perceives a situation to be challenging, threatening, or uncontrollable, the brain initiates the endocrine stress response: an increase in the production of hormone cortisol, often referred to as the “stress hormone”. Cortisol increases the level of energy fuel available by mobilizing glucose and fatty acids from the liver. Cortisol is normally produced in varying levels throughout the day, typically increasing in concentration upon awakening and

slowly declining throughout the day, providing a daily cycle of energy. During a stressful event, an increase in cortisol can provide the energy required to deal with prolonged or extreme challenge. Chronic stress can result in development of **numerous physical and mental health conditions**, including chronic fatigue, metabolic disorders (e.g., diabetes, obesity), depression, and immune disorders.

Gastrointestinal system: Stress may trigger pain, bloating, and other gut discomfort to be felt more easily. Stress is associated with changes in gut bacteria which in turn can influence mood. Thus, the gut's nerves and bacteria strongly influence the brain and vice versa.

Esophagus: When stressed, individuals may eat much more or much less than usual. More or **different foods, or an increase in the use of alcohol or tobacco**, can result in heartburn or acid reflux. Stress or exhaustion can also increase the severity of regularly occurring heartburn pain. A rare case of spasms in the esophagus can be set off by intense stress and can be easily mistaken for a heart attack. Stress also may make swallowing foods difficult or increase the amount of air that is swallowed, which increases burping, gassiness, and bloating.

Stomach: Stress may make pain, bloating, nausea, and other stomach discomfort felt more easily. Vomiting may occur if the stress is severe enough. Furthermore, stress may cause an unnecessary increase or decrease in appetite. Unhealthy diets may in turn deteriorate one's mood. Contrary to popular belief, stress does not increase acid production in the stomach, nor causes stomach ulcers. The latter are actually caused by a bacterial infection. When stressed, ulcers may be more bothersome.

Bowel: Stress can also make pain, bloating, or discomfort felt more easily in the bowels. It can affect how quickly food moves through the body, which can cause either diarrhea or constipation. Furthermore, stress can induce muscle spasms in the bowel, which can be painful. Stress can affect digestion and what nutrients the intestines absorb. Gas production related to nutrient absorption may increase. Stress especially affects people with chronic bowel disorders, such as inflammatory bowel disease or irritable bowel syndrome.

Nervous system: When the body is stressed, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) contributes to what is known as the “fight or flight” response. The body shifts its energy resources toward fighting off a life threat, or fleeing from an enemy. The SNS signals the adrenal glands to release hormones called adrenalin and cortisol. These hormones, together with direct actions of autonomic nerves, cause **the heart to beat faster, respiration rate to increase, blood vessels in the arms and legs to dilate, digestive process to change and glucose levels (sugar energy) in the bloodstream to increase to deal with the emergency**. The SNS response is fairly sudden in order to prepare the body to respond to an emergency situation or acute stress—short term stressors. Once the crisis is over, the body usually returns to the pre-emergency, unstressed state. The central nervous system is particularly important in triggering stress responses, as it regulates the autonomic nervous system and plays a central role in interpreting contexts as potentially

threatening. Chronic stress, experiencing stressors over a prolonged period of time, can result in a long-term drain on the body. As the autonomic nervous system continues to trigger physical reactions, it causes a wear-and-tear on the body. It's not so much what chronic stress does to the nervous system, but what continuous activation of the nervous system does to other bodily systems that become problematic.

Male reproductive system: The male reproductive system is influenced by the nervous system. Stress causes the body to release the hormone cortisol, which is important to blood pressure regulation and the normal functioning of several body systems including cardiovascular, circulatory, and male reproduction. Excess amounts of cortisol can affect the normal biochemical functioning of the male reproductive system.

Sexual desire: Chronic stress can affect testosterone production resulting in a decline in sex drive or libido, and can even cause erectile dysfunction or impotence.

Reproduction: Chronic stress can also negatively impact sperm production and maturation, causing difficulties in couples who are trying to conceive. Researchers have found that men who experienced two or more stressful life events in the past year had a lower percentage of sperm motility (ability to swim) and a lower percentage of sperm of normal morphology (size and shape), compared with men who did not experience any stressful life events. When stress affects the immune system, the body can become vulnerable to infection.

Female reproductive system: Menstruation: Stress may affect menstruation among adolescent girls and women in several ways. For example, high levels of stress may be associated with absent or irregular menstrual cycles, more painful periods, and changes in the length of cycles.

Sexual desire: Stress may reduce sexual desire. **Pregnancy:** Stress can negatively impact a woman's ability to conceive, the health of her pregnancy, and her postpartum adjustment. Excess stress increases the likelihood of developing depression and anxiety during this time. Maternal stress can negatively impact fetal and ongoing childhood development and disrupt bonding with the baby in the weeks and months following delivery.

Diseases of the reproductive system: When stress is high, there is increased chance of exacerbation of symptoms of reproductive disease states.

Emotional distress may cause the physical symptoms to be worse.

Some Signs of Stress:

- Blood pressure may rise
- Heart may pound
- Muscles may tighten

- Stomach may become tense
- Concentration may get worse
- Forgetfulness may get worse

Stressors may include:

- Adapting to constant, rapid change
- Worrying about your finances or the economy
- Handling a major life event, such as changing jobs, marriage, divorce, death of a loved one, or moving to a new home
- Handling more than 1 major life event at the same time. For instance, dealing with a family illness while changing jobs
- Juggling many roles and responsibilities, such as spouse or life partner, parent, friend, employee, and caregiver for aging parents
- Going from 1 challenging situation to the next without taking time to relax
- Being overwhelmed by technology. For instance, keeping up with cellphone messages, e-mails, and text messages.

The long-term effects of stress

If you're often under stress, you need to learn to manage it well. Stress can affect your well-being. Over time, you may show some of these symptoms of being stressed:

- **Physical.** Frequent colds or flu, headaches, trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, muscle tension, skin problems, trouble with digestion
- **Mental.** Poor concentration, forgetfulness, learning problems, frequent negative thoughts, speech problems
- **Emotional.** Anxiety, depression, anger, irritability, feelings of helplessness, lack of purpose, relationship troubles
- **Behavioral.** Eating poorly, driving recklessly, abusing alcohol or drugs, being accident prone, showing aggression

Example of assessment tool:

My Mental Health: Do I Need Help? (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/my-mental-health-do-i-need-help>)

Do I have **mild symptoms** that have lasted for less than 2 weeks:

- Feeling a little down
- Feeling down, but still able to do job, schoolwork, or housework
- Some trouble sleeping
- Feeling down, but still able to take care of yourself or take care of others
- If so, here are some self-care activities that can help:
- Exercising (e.g., aerobics, yoga)
- Engaging in social contact (virtual or in person)
- Getting adequate sleep on a regular schedule
- Eating healthy
- Talking to a trusted friend or family member
- Practicing meditation, relaxation, and mindfulness

If the symptoms above do not improve or seem to be worsening despite self-care efforts, talk to your health care provider.

Do I have **severe symptoms** that have lasted **2 weeks or more**:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable
- Unable to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities
- Thoughts of death or self-harm

If you have severe symptoms for 2 weeks or longer, seek professional help.

Best practices and healthy techniques

Stress management strategies (from American Psychological Association):

Unhealthy ways of coping with stress that actually just make things worse: using drugs, overeating, smoking, taking it out on others, watching TV mindlessly, or playing video games all day, or oversleeping. All of these things might make you feel better in the short term, but in the long run they end up just making things a lot worse.

Beneficial strategies include:

- Maintaining a healthy social support network
- Engaging in regular physical exercise
- Getting an adequate amount of sleep each night
- Physical activity, a healthy nutritious and varied diet, and good sleep hygiene are a good starting point.

These approaches have important benefits for physical and mental health, and form critical building blocks for a healthy lifestyle.

Coping With Stress (from the National Institute of Health):

Learning what causes or triggers your stress and what coping techniques work for you can help reduce negative consequences and improve your daily life. It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you. Here are some activities you can try when you start to feel overwhelmed:

- Keep a journal;
- Download an app that provides relaxation exercises (such as deep breathing or visualization) or tips for practicing mindfulness, which is a psychological process of actively paying attention to the present moment.
- Exercise, and make sure you are eating healthy, regular meals.
- Stick to a sleep routine, and make sure you are getting enough sleep.
- Avoid drinking excess caffeine such as soft drinks or coffee.
- Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.
- Reach out to your friends or family members who help you cope in a positive way.
- Recognize When You Need More Help

If you are struggling to cope, or the symptoms of your stress or anxiety won't go away, it may be time to talk to a professional. Psychotherapy (also called talk therapy) and medication are the two main treatments for anxiety, and many people benefit from a combination of the two.

Self-Care: Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact. Healthy **strategies** include:

Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost your mood and improve your health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so don't be discouraged if you can't do 30 minutes at one time.

Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated. A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus throughout the day. Also, limit caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks or coffee.

Make sleep a priority. Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure from your phone or computer before bedtime.

Try a relaxing activity. Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy such as journaling.

Set goals and priorities. Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.

Practice gratitude. Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night, or replay them in your mind.

Focus on positivity. Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.

Stay connected. Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help.

Self-care looks different for everyone, and it is important to find what you need and enjoy. It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you. In addition, although self-care is not a cure for mental illnesses, understanding what causes or triggers your mild symptoms and what coping techniques work for you can help manage your mental health.

Once you recognize that you're having some symptoms of stress, you can take charge of it by addressing it and trying to reduce those symptoms. Some options are trying to exercise, meditation, getting organized, which is a way of taking control of what you can control, taking some me time, doing things you enjoy, or even just making sure you're getting enough sleep, but not too much sleep, remember that that could also be a symptom of stress. Some positive options that are some that were mentioned earlier like my exercise or meditation, as well as going to

therapy, talking things out with friends or family, writing in a journal, or picking up a creative hobby to focus on.

GREAT: Helpful Practices to Manage Stress and Anxiety (NIH):

- Gratitude
- Relaxation
- Exercise
- Acknowledge feelings
- Track and reframe negative thoughts

Useful tools to manage stress:

- Guided Visualization
- Mindfulness and Meditation
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (and general relaxation techniques)
- Expressive Writing techniques

How do children and adolescents respond to stressful events? Regardless of age, children and adolescents may:

- Report having physical problems such as stomachaches or headaches.
- Have nightmares or other sleep problems, including refusing to go to bed.
- Have trouble concentrating.
- Lose interest in activities they normally enjoy.
- Have feelings of guilt for not preventing injuries or deaths.
- Have thoughts of revenge.

Young children (age 5 and younger) may:

- Cling to caregivers and/or cry and be tearful.
- Have tantrums, or be irritable or disruptive.
- Suddenly return to behaviors such as bed-wetting and thumb-sucking.

- Show increased fearfulness (for example, fear of the dark, monsters, or being alone).
- Incorporate aspects of the traumatic event into imaginary play.

Older children (age 6 and older) and adolescents may:

- Have problems in school.
- Withdraw or become isolated from family and friends.
- Avoid reminders of the event.
- Use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.
- Be disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive.
- Be angry or resentful.

Many of these reactions are normal and will lessen with time. If these symptoms last for more than a month, the family should reach out to a health care provider.

What can adults do to help?

How adults respond to stressful events can strongly influence how children and adolescents react. When caregivers and family members take steps to support their own ability to cope, they can provide better care for others. Caregivers and family members can help by creating a safe and supportive environment, remaining as calm as possible, and reducing stressors. Children and adolescents need to know that their family members love them and will do their best to take care of them.

Do:

- Ensure children and adolescents are safe and that their basic needs are addressed.
- Allow them to be sad or cry.
- Let them talk, write, or draw pictures about the event and their feelings.
- Limit their exposure to repetitive news reports about traumatic events.
- Let them sleep in your room (for a short time) or sleep with a light on if they are having trouble sleeping.
- Try to stick to routines, such as reading bedtime stories, eating dinner together, and playing games.
- Help them feel in control by letting them make some decisions for themselves, such as choosing their meals or picking out their clothes.
- Pay attention to sudden changes in behaviors, speech, language use, or strong emotions.

- Contact a health care provider if new problems develop, particularly if any of the following symptoms occur for more than a few weeks:
- Having flashbacks (reliving the event)
- Having a racing heart and sweating
- Being easily startled
- Being emotionally numb
- Being very sad or depressed

Don't:

- Expect children and adolescents to be brave or tough.
- Make them discuss the event before they are ready.
- Get angry if they show strong emotions.
- Get upset if they begin bed-wetting, acting out, or thumb-sucking.
- Make promises you can't keep (such as "You will be OK tomorrow" or "You will go home soon.")

Stress in Adolescents (National Institute of Health):

There are several coping strategies you can try to reduce your stress:

- Keep a journal to help identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.
- Do a body scan to identify physical symptoms of stress and anxiety in your body like headaches or body pain.
- Download an app that provides relaxation or mindfulness exercises such as deep breathing or visualization.
- Exercise, eat healthy, avoid caffeine, and stick to a sleep routine.
- And reach out to your friends or family members who can help you cope in a positive way.
- If you are still struggling to cope, or the symptoms won't go away, share how you're feeling with a parent or trusted adult. It may be time to talk to a health care professional.

How to help children and teens manage their stress (APA)

Prolonged stress can cause high blood pressure, weaken the immune system, and contribute to diseases such as obesity and heart disease. It can also lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression—disorders that are becoming more common in youth. **Recognize the signs of stress:**

1. Irritability and anger:
2. Changes in behavior:
3. Trouble sleeping:
4. Neglecting responsibilities:
5. Eating changes:
6. Getting sick more often:

Facing stressors is a fact of life, for children and adults. These strategies can help keep stress in check:

- Sleep well.
- Exercise.
- Make time for fun—and quiet.
- Get outside.
- Write about it.
- Learn mindfulness.

How parents can help:

Parents and other caregivers have an important part to play, by adopting their own healthy habits and helping children and teens find stress-managing strategies. Some ways parents can take action:

- Model healthy coping.
- Let kids be problem-solvers.
- Promote media literacy.
- Combat negative thinking. “I’m terrible at math.” “I hate my hair.” “I’ll never make the team. Why try out?” Children and teens can easily fall into the trap of negative thinking. When children use negative self-talk, though, don’t just disagree. Ask them to really think about whether what they say is true, or remind them of times they worked hard and improved. Learning to frame things positively will help them develop resilience to stress.

How psychologists can help

Psychologists are experts in helping people manage stress and establish positive mental health habits.

There are apps that help to reduce stress (seek stress management apps for mindfulness, meditation, relaxation, breathing exercises).

11 healthy ways to handle life's stressors (from American Psychological Association):

Some **evidence-based tools** to help combat the negative effects of stress in healthy ways. They recommend that you:

- Try to eliminate the stressors:
- Cultivate social support:
- Seek good nutrition:
- Relax your muscles:
- Meditate:
- Protect your sleep:
- Get physical:
- Take a moment in nature:
- Keep your pleasurable activities:
- Reframe your thinking:
- Seek help:

What can I do to help myself? Here are some things you can do to help yourself:

- Talk with your health care provider about treatment options, and follow your treatment plan.
- Engage in exercise, mindfulness, or other activities that help reduce stress.
- Try to maintain routines for meals, exercise, and sleep.
- Set realistic goals and do what you can as you are able.

- Spend time with trusted friends or relatives, and tell them about things that may trigger symptoms.
- Expect your symptoms to improve gradually, not immediately.
- Avoid use of alcohol or drugs.

When to Seek Professional Help (National Institute of Health):

Seek professional help if you are experiencing severe or distressing symptoms that have lasted 2 weeks or more, such as:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable
- Inability to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities

Don't wait until your symptoms are overwhelming. Talk about your concerns with your primary care provider, who can refer you to a mental health professional if needed.

How to cope with traumatic stress (APA)

Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to an abnormal event. Usually, symptoms get better with time, but people with more intense symptoms may need professional help

Damar Hamlin's unexpected collapse at Paycor Stadium in Cincinnati on the January 2, 2023 live broadcast of Monday Night Football was a traumatic event that affected a broad swath of Americans. National Football League players from Hamlin's team, the Buffalo Bills, and their opponents, the Bengals, as well as an audience of tens of millions, were shocked and devastated that the 24-year-old safety was administered CPR on the field after suffering cardiac arrest.

How people react and respond to trauma can vary, according to the National Center for PTSD.

Common reactions and responses to trauma

Following a traumatic event, people frequently feel stunned, disoriented, or unable to integrate distressing information. Once these initial reactions subside, people can experience a variety of thoughts and behaviors. Common responses can be:

Intense or unpredictable feelings. You may be anxious, nervous, overwhelmed, or grief-stricken. You may also feel more irritable or moody than usual. Changes to thoughts and behavior patterns. You might have repeated and vivid memories of the event. These memories may occur for no apparent reason and may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating. It may be difficult to concentrate or make decisions. Sleep and eating patterns also can be disrupted—some people may overeat and oversleep, while others experience a loss of sleep and loss of appetite. Sensitivity to environmental factors. Sirens, loud noises, or other environmental sensations may stimulate memories of the disaster creating heightened anxiety. These “triggers” may be accompanied by fears that the stressful event will be repeated. Strained interpersonal relationships. Increased conflict, such as more frequent disagreements with family members and coworkers, can occur. You might also become withdrawn, isolated, or disengaged from your usual social activities. Stress-related physical symptoms. Headaches, nausea, and chest pain may occur and could require medical attention. Preexisting medical conditions could be affected by disaster-related stress.

Coping with traumatic stress

The good news is that there are very effective ways to cope with and treat the stressful effects of trauma. Psychologists and other researchers have found that these actions can help:

Lean on your loved ones. Identify friends or family members for support. If you feel ready to discuss the traumatic event, you might talk to them about your experience and your feelings. You can also ask loved ones to help you with household tasks or other obligations to relieve some of your daily stress. Face your feelings. It’s normal to want to avoid thinking about a traumatic event. But not leaving the house, sleeping excessively, isolating yourself from loved ones, and using substances to escape reminders are not healthy ways to cope over time. Though avoidance is normal, too much of it can prolong your stress and keep you from healing. Gradually, try to ease back into a normal routine. Support from loved ones or a mental health professional can help a lot as you get back in the groove. Prioritize self-care. Do your best to eat nutritious meals, get regular physical activity, and get a good night’s sleep. And seek out other healthy coping strategies such as art, music, meditation, relaxation, and spending time in nature. Be patient. Remember that it’s normal to have a strong reaction to a distressing event. Take things one day at a time as you recover. As the days pass, your symptoms should start to gradually improve.

When to seek help

Not everyone requires treatment for traumatic stress. Most people recover on their own with time. However, mental health professionals such as psychologists can help you find healthy ways to cope in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

If your distress is interfering with your relationships, work, or daily functioning, you may have acute stress disorder or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Treatments for traumatic stress

Psychologists can provide evidence-based interventions to help you cope with traumatic stress or acute stress disorder.

One is **Psychological First Aid (PFA)**, originally designed to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the aftermath of a disaster or terrorism. It's now used to help people who have experienced any type of trauma. PFA is based on the idea that distress is normal after a traumatic event. Rather than treat that stress like a disorder, the focus of this approach is to provide support and assistance and share information about stress reactions and coping strategies. Mental health providers and disaster response workers provide PFA in the days and weeks after a trauma, in diverse settings including hospitals, housing shelters, community settings, and even over telephone crisis hotlines. The goal of PFA is to reduce distress and improve coping and functioning, both short-term and long-term.

Another evidence-based treatment is **cognitive behavioral therapy**, or CBT, which is used to treat many psychological disorders, including traumatic stress. CBT is a psychological treatment that helps people learn to change unhelpful thinking and behavioral patterns. The World Health Organization recommends trauma-focused CBT to treat symptoms of acute traumatic stress in adults. Some research also suggests that people who receive trauma-focused CBT may be less likely to develop chronic PTSD.

Keys to Managing Stress

Recognizing stress: Learn to recognize your stress and find out what triggers it. To do this, try to be aware of how you feel each day. If you notice your heart racing or your muscles tightening, your body may be responding to stress. Ask yourself why. Then write down your answer. To keep the process going, make a list of all the things that trigger stressful feelings.

Responding better to stress: Life is full of stressors that you can't control. But you can learn more positive ways of responding to them. This will help you feel more in control. To begin, try this tip: Think about how much effort you want to put into dealing with a certain stressor. Do you really need to handle that stressor? If so, decide on the best way to manage it. Change what you can. But if the stressor isn't important, or if it's out of your control, then you may want to change how you are thinking about it.

Living a healthy life: Keeping yourself healthy may help you manage stress more successfully. This means getting enough sleep, eating wisely, and being physically active. It also means knowing what you value most in life and making time for yourself. You might find it helpful to

keep a daily health journal to see if you're doing these things. Then, read your journal each week. As you take better care of yourself, you will likely feel less stressed.

Relaxing to slow down: Relaxing and being more mindful can help you prevent or relieve stressful feelings. There are many ways to do this, and different things work for different people. Some people like to listen to guided relaxation. A variety of guided relaxation recordings are available on the Manage Stress page. This tip may also help: When you're facing a stressor, pause for a moment. Then take a deep breath and slowly breathe out as you count to 10. This will help clear your mind so you can respond more thoughtfully.

Problem solve

Express yourself

Manage your time

Think positively

Be physically active

Plan pleasant activities

Tips to help you control stressful situations:

Find the causes of your stress: Things that bring stress are called stressors. They can be everyday events, like driving in traffic; disruptions to your routine, like holiday celebrations; or life changes, like moving or changing jobs. Once you learn what your stressors are, you can develop a plan for dealing with them.

Know the signs: Step one of handling stress is knowing how you respond to it. Some common responses are:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased alcohol and other substance use
- Being easily angered
- Feeling depressed
- Low energy

Sometimes we don't even realize how our actions may change when stressed. That's why it's a good idea to start using a stress tracker. This is a great tool to see what patterns you may have or how you typically respond to stress. It helps you identify stressors and their effects on your health.

Stay connected and social: Find small ways to connect with people. Don't let stress keep you from video chatting or just telephoning friends and family. Taking a break from watching the news or being on social media may help you decompress while connecting with the people around you. It's good to have balance in your life so that you don't start to feel overwhelmed. Reaching out in your social circles can keep you on track.

Talk to your doctor or mental health professional: It can be hard to admit when you're feeling stressed. Especially if it's related to something positive, like holiday festivities. But if you're uncomfortable, let your doctor know. You can start the conversation about new or existing problems. Sign in today and use Secure Messaging (sign in required) to talk to your doctor about your stress.

Additional Tips to Manage Stress

Try:

- 1) **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is a practice you can adopt in your everyday life, and you can try it right now. Take a moment, close your eyes, and observe you're experiencing in the present moment.
- 2) **Breathing:** Breathing exercises are a practice you can implement this holiday season to manage stressful situations.
- 3) **Exercise:** When in doubt, work it out. Regular exercise can help relieve stress, and some types of exercise like tai chi and yoga have added mental health benefits.
- 4) **Acupressure:** Take your stress into your own hands. Apply pressure and massage certain acupressure points to get relief.
- 5) **Asking for Help:** Seek services and treatments like counseling and medication.

Asking for help is a sign of strength.

Responding Better to Stress: Stress Management Tips

These tips may be helpful:

- Humor may help you take your mind off stress. Try seeing a funny movie when you are stressed.
- Decide whether the stressor is important enough to deal with. Ask yourself, "Is letting this stressor bother me worth the harm it may cause me?"

- Put a positive spin on stress. Seeing things in a positive way can help you deal with stress better. Think of your stressors as challenges you can handle. If you have negative thoughts, start learning to change them to positive ones.
- Use positive self-talk. Instead of saying: “If I don’t get this report done on time, I’ll be fired.” Say: “I’ll ask for the extra time. I need to do a good job on the report.” Instead of saying: “My spouse hasn’t called me about our sick child. Maybe they went to the hospital.” Say: “My spouse must be busy caring for our child. I’ll call to find out how they’re doing.”
- Getting support. Build a support network of people who will talk with you or help you manage stress. A support network may help you deal with your stressors in new ways. To form your network: Talk with a friend, family member, or mentor.
- Look for stress management apps that are available online or on your mobile device. Talk with your healthcare provider for suggestions.
- Join a support group of people who are dealing with challenges like yours.
- Meet with your clergy person or spiritual guide.
- Check with your campus, school, or company’s human resources department to find out about stress management programs. Many workplaces offer an employee assistance program (EAP).

Manage Stress with a Healthy Lifestyle:

- Get enough rest
- Make time for yourself
- Eat wisely
- Nourish your spirit
- Be physically active
- Do things you enjoy, plan pleasant activities: Go see a movie.
- Spend time in nature. Go for a walk in a park or forest.
- Have lunch with a friend.
- Learn a new skill, sport, or game.
- Plan a fun trip.

- Take a class on something you always wanted to learn.
- Try a new hobby.

Useful links:

<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/tips>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/children/stress>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/work-stress>

<https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma/stress>

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/related/acute_stress.asp

https://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/142,85165_VA

<https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/ss20161212-managing-stress-identify-respond-relieve>

Home assignments:

Translate in your language meditations, exercises and tools introduced in this course.

Find and watch youtube videos on guided visualization, breathing techniques, massage, meditation.

Practice these meditations, exercises and tools alone, together with other participants in this course, with your family/friends/colleagues/community members.

Create flyers / leaflets with useful contact information in your town: emergency services, medical services, mental health services, psychotherapy / counseling services, support groups, services for refugees or displaced persons, other useful organizations and services (GYM / Recreation, services for children, support groups, etc.).

Activity: Stressors and Resources

Supplies: pen/pencil, Stress Management worksheet

To manage your stress, it is helpful to know what resources you do have. Many resources fall into broad categories such as supportive social networks, personal skills and interests, as well as your life experiences.

Instruction: Complete the Stress Management worksheet:

Write a list of specific resources that you currently have in Column 1 (Examples may include: helpful friends, strong family, savings, coping ability, hobbies, caring minister, great family traditions, creativity, experiences with challenges, religious faith, pay and leisure activities, local library, personal journal realistic expectations, healthy lifestyle, family pet, mentors, advisors, or counselors.)

Make a new list that includes all of the stresses and challenges you are currently facing in Column 2 (Examples may include: balancing caregiving and work, health problems, job loss, divorce, or decision-making). Rate your stressors from the most stressful to the least stressful. Check, if there are any stressors that you can avoid or remove from your life.

Take your list of challenges (Column 2) and compare/pair it with your list of existing resources (Column 1). Can you identify any resources that can help you deal with your challenge? Do you have stressors that cannot be addressed with existing resources? Circle these stressors in Column 2.

For any stressors that do not have a resource, create a list of resources that would help and think about ways in which you can seek such help in Column 3.

Finally, discuss the strength of identifying existing and needed resources. Brainstorm resources for particular stressors as a group.

Reduce worries: Plan and prepare and rehearse in advance! How can you expand your resources?

What helped you in the past (to relax, to successfully overcome stressful situation)?