

Question 11: I'm always stressed out. What do you recommend to reduce stress?

We all respond to stress differently and there is no one solution for everyone. If you feel like you are overwhelmed by stress no matter how powerless you may feel in the face of stress, you still have control over your lifestyle, thoughts, emotions, and the way you deal with problems. Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can't, taking care of yourself and making time for rest and relaxation. The first step is to recognize the true sources of stress in your life

When dealing with stressful situations, consider the four points below. They may aid in decreasing the amount of stress and changing the way you view it:

-First, remember that nothing and no one can "make" you feel anything. We are the ones who give meaning to the events in our lives and how we choose to react to them.

-How you feel and the way you deal with a situation is a choice. If a situation cannot be changed, such as an illness or the economy, accept it for what it is. By accepting the situation and finding ways you can cope with what cannot be changed, stress can be drastically reduced.

-Closely related to this is watching our attitude. Our thoughts have a powerful effect on how we deal with situations. Negative attitudes have a negative effect, especially on our mental wellbeing. Neuroscience has shown us that every thought has a corresponding chemical reaction. If you harbor negative thoughts this will send a cascade of chemicals throughout your body which can negatively affect our immune system or cardiovascular system. Positive thoughts can have the reverse affect.

-When stressed, we also need to slow down our physiology. We can do this by finding something that you enjoy and do it every day. If you can set aside time for relaxation, do it. Try to set aside a designated, uninterrupted time and stick to it. Many people state they don't have time to relax, but relaxation does not have to be time-consuming. Relaxation can include periodic 5-10 minute breaks of breathing exercises or watching your favorite show for 30 minutes. Relaxation can also include connecting with positive people. It can be taking up the practice of meditation for 15-20 minutes each day or doing some kind of visualization exercise. It can be taking a short walk around the neighborhood or getting some physical exercise. All of these kinds of activities will have a positive effect on our minds and bodies.

One other point to remember is to keep life in perspective. When we are stressed we can lose sight of what is really important and what really matters in the long run. We may even have a tendency to catastrophize. Sometimes we need to re-evaluate what is truly important and what we really need to live with. Changing perspective can have a profound effect on reducing stress.