

## **Tips for managing everyday stress**



Learning to handle stress in healthy ways is very important. Fortunately, it is easy to learn simple techniques that help. These include recognising and changing the behaviours that contribute to stress, as well as techniques for reducing stress once it has occurred. The following tips from the APS can help you look after your mind and body, and reduce stress and its impact on your health.

### **Identify warning signs**

These vary from person to person, but might include things like tensing your jaw, grinding your teeth, getting headaches, or feeling irritable and short tempered.

### **Identify triggers**

There are often known triggers which raise our stress levels and make it more difficult for us to manage. If you know what the likely triggers are, you can aim to anticipate them and practise calming yourself down beforehand, or even find ways of removing the trigger. Triggers might include late nights, deadlines, seeing particular people, hunger or over-tired children.

### **Establish routines**

Having predictable rhythms and routines in your day, or over a week, such as regular times for exercise and relaxation, meal times, waking and bedtimes, can be very calming and reassuring, and can help you to manage your stress.

### **Look after your health**

Make sure you are eating healthy food and getting regular exercise. Take time to do activities you find calming or uplifting, such as listening to music, walking or dancing. Avoid using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope.

### **Notice your 'self-talk'**

When we are stressed we sometimes say things in our head, over and over, that just add to our stress. This unhelpful self-talk might include things like: 'I can't cope', or 'I'm too busy', or 'I'm so tired', or 'It's not fair'. Try more helpful self-talk like 'I'm coping well given what's on my plate', or 'Calm down', or 'Breathe easy'.

### **Spend time with people who care**

Spending time with people you care about, and who care about you, is an important part of managing ongoing stress in your life. Share your thoughts and feelings with others when opportunities arise. Don't 'bottle up' your feelings.



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### **Practise relaxation**

Make time to practise relaxation. This will help your body and nervous system to settle and readjust. Consider learning a formal relaxation technique such as progressive muscle relaxation, meditation or yoga; or make time to absorb yourself in a relaxing activity such as gardening or listening to music.

### **When to seek professional help**

If high levels of stress continue for a long period of time, or are interfering with you enjoying a healthy life, it is worth seeking professional help. A mental health professional, like a psychologist, can help you identify behaviours and situations that are contributing to high stress, and help you to make changes to the things that are within your control. Seeking help can be one way to manage your stress effectively.

To talk to an APS psychologist, speak to your GP about a referral or contact the APS Find a Psychologist Service by calling 1800 333 497 or visiting the website [www.findapsychologist.org.au](http://www.findapsychologist.org.au)

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