

Tips to Reduce Stress and Sleep Better

Stress is our response to daily life. It affects us emotionally, physically, and behaviorally. The right amount of stress can be a positive force that helps us to do our best and to keep alert and energetic. Too much stress, however, can make us tense and anxious and can cause sleep problems.

What Are the Signs of Stress?

Common signs of stress include depression, sleep problems, tension, anxiety, work mistakes, poor concentration, and apathy, among many others. If high levels of unwanted stress are not properly managed, your health and sense of well-being can suffer. Therefore, it is important to learn how to manage stress.

Tips for Managing Stress for Better Sleep

These tips can help you ease stress and hopefully get a better night's sleep:

- **Assess what is stressful:** The first step in getting a handle on stress is to figure out what is causing it. Take a good look at your physical condition and your daily activities. Do you suffer from pain? Are you overloaded at work? Once you identify your stressors, you can take steps to reduce them.
- **Seek social support:** Spending time with family and friends is an important buffer against stress. It can be helpful to share your problems with people who care for you.
- **Practice thought management:** What we think, how we think, what we expect, and what we tell ourselves often determine how we feel and how well we manage rising stress levels. You can learn to change thought patterns that produce stress. Thoughts to watch out for include those concerning how things should be and those that overgeneralize sets of circumstances (for example, "I'm a failure at my whole job because I missed one deadline.") Many commercial audiotapes and books can help you learn thought management exercises.
- **Exercise:** Exercise can help you blow off steam, thereby reducing stress. In addition, flexible, loose muscles are less likely to become tight and painful in response to stress. However, it's best to exercise at least 2 hours before bedtime so that your body temperature returns to normal. If you have a medical condition or are over age 50, it's best to check with your doctor before beginning an exercise regimen.
- **Eat a healthy diet:** Junk food and refined sugars low in nutritional value and high in calories can leave us feeling out of energy and sluggish. A healthy diet, low in sugar, caffeine, and alcohol, can promote health and reduce stress.
- **Get adequate sleep:** A good night's sleep makes you able to tackle the day's stress more easily. When you are tired, you are less patient and more easily agitated, which can increase stress. Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Practicing good sleep hygiene along with stress-lowering tactics can help improve your quality of sleep.
- **Delegate responsibility:** Often, having too many responsibilities can lead to stress. Free up time and decrease stress by delegating responsibilities.

These steps can help many people sleep soundly through the night. However, if you have frequent sleep problems, talk to your doctor. Your doctor can assess you for possible sleep disorders and recommend safe and effective sleep medicine.

SOURCE: The National Sleep Foundation.
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http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/guide/tips-reduce-stress?ecd=wnl_slwD_090414_tempD&ctr=wnl-slw-090414-tempD_promo_2&mb=tdqBiFFJJL7DPXNZ2FHEaeHnVevIimbCy0%2f9rpkC37M%3d