

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS AND SADNESS

1. **EXERCISE CAN HELP IMPROVE YOUR MOOD** by helping you to relax, increasing your stamina, releasing natural “tranquilizers” (endorphins), and improving your sleep. Start with five to ten minutes of exercise daily and work up to twenty to thirty minutes of aerobic walking, biking, running or swimming at least three times a week—something to get your heart-beating & your body sweating. Check with your doctor if you have any medical conditions that could be exacerbated.
2. **GOOD NUTRITION WILL FORTIFY YOUR BODY**, while over-eating, skipping meals or eating “junk” food may deplete your body of essential nutrients that keep you healthy. Be sure to eat only when you are hungry, don’t skip a meal, and select wholesome fruits and vegetables as a treat. Consider consulting with a nutritionist.
3. **AVOID HARMFUL SUBSTANCES**, such as alcohol, nicotine, caffeine (found in coffee and soda), and other drugs. While they can sometimes appear to cause a very brief break from your symptoms, they will then immediately make them worse. Many are also addictive. These substances create problems you cannot afford. If you can’t abstain cut back substantially.
4. **RELAX WITH PLEASURABLE ACTIVITIES**. Do something fun, enjoyable, and healthy. Consider enjoyable hobbies you used to have but no longer do. Try at least one favorite activity a day
5. **ARGUE AGAINST NEGATIVE THOUGHTS**. When you have negative or unhelpful thoughts (and they always precede negative moods), note the thoughts (ideally in writing), evaluate them (as they are almost always irrational or at least unhelpful), and then respond to them with more rational or helpful thoughts. Consider viewing difficulties as challenges instead of defeats. Better moods will follow.
6. **COMFORT YOURSELF WITH COMPANIONSHIP**. Family and friends are “good medicine.” They can remind you of your strengths and better times. Seek out positive people who will listen without judging or giving advice.
7. **USE RELAXATION EXERCISES**. Try ten minutes of slow, deep breathing. You can also use guided imagery, “progressive muscle relaxation,” or some other relaxing activity of your choice. You can some at <http://www.hws.edu/studentlife/resources/counseling/relax.asp>.
8. **MEDITATION AND/OR PRAYER CAN LIFT THE SPIRIT**. Engage in activities which renew or inspire your heart and mind. Spend time in nature and seek out beauty. Look for meaning in your life or own spiritual path. Find ways to accept yourself or forgive your mistakes in life.
9. **SLEEP**. If you are frequently tired and/or know your sleep is not good, consider ways to improve your sleep. For suggestions on helping to get more sleep, see reverse side “How to get a Good Night’s Sleep.”
10. **TIME MANAGEMENT**. Rushing around and/or not getting tasks done increases stress and can bring you down. Create lists of tasks and organize your time with a scheduling book. Prioritize. Have fun checking off items as you get them done. Also, make sure you do not take on too much; consider saying “no” to people who ask for more than you want or need.
11. **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**. Not getting along with others increases stress and/or sadness. One way to improve your communication skills is to really listen to the other person, imagine what they are feeling, and express understanding. Similarly, make sure that others know how you are feeling. Do not be passive or aggressive. Be assertive.
12. **LAUGHTER**. Humor is a wonderful stress reliever and mood enhancer. Watch funny movies or TV shows. Talk to people who make you laugh. Look for the lighter side of life.
13. **TALK TO A THERAPIST OR DOCTOR**. They can help you assess your situation and find proper treatment. If you have not had a physical exam recently, do so. IF FEELING SUICIDAL, seek immediate help. Call 1-800-273-8255.

References:

Anxiety & Phobia Workbook – Edmund J. Bourne
Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook – Martha Davis & others