

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Tactics to Stave Off Stress

Fatigue, chronic pain, acne, weight gain and heart disease—the reality of prolonged exposure to stress is not pretty. What can you do to stop stress from physically and emotionally dragging you down? Read on to discover a few tried and true tactics to stave off stress's negative effects.

Forgive, even if you can't forget. If emotional baggage is weighing you down, throw it away. Whether you're upset with a colleague, family member or even yourself, hanging on to negative feelings can keep you stuck in stress indefinitely. You may not ever be able to forget the event that upset you, but forgiving it, or at least 'letting go' of the negative energy it created, will help you feel lighter and more positive.

Step away from the desk (or line, or counter). Instead of stewing in stress, give yourself a short break to decompress. Clear your head and calm down. Even a few minutes alone can help you keep your cool and restore sapped energy.

Laugh it off. There is actually science to support that "laughter is the best medicine." Studies suggest a good chuckle can reduce stress hormone levels and boost your immune system. Put a humorous spin on workplace antics when you'd normally release a stressed out sigh, share a funny story with a colleague, or take a minute to check out a favorite comic strip.

Enlist help. Feel like you've got the weight of the world on your shoulders? Don't be afraid to ask for support when you need it. There may be many people—colleagues, friends or family—willing to help lighten the load. Many people wrongly believe asking for help is a sign of weakness, instead of what it really is: a clear understanding of your own capabilities.

Create a de-stressing ritual. Whether it's listening to a relaxation tape on your commute, doing a crossword puzzle on your break, or swinging clubs at the driving range find ways to integrate a little rest and relaxation into your day. Focusing on an activity you enjoy that is completely separate from the pressures of work and life will lift your spirits, recharge your batteries and help keep stress at bay.

Break it down. When the going gets tough, the tough make lists. Have a huge project looming that's causing your stomach to knot? Instead of fretting over the enormity of the job, make a list of the steps or tasks needed to get the job done. Breaking larger responsibilities into smaller, more manageable chunks will prevent you from feeling overwhelmed and help you track your progress in a clearly defined way.

Exercise. Regular physical activity not only helps you blow off steam and improves your physical health; it can also increase levels of mood-enhancing endorphins in the brain. Think you're too busy to squeeze in a workout? Studies suggest short 10-minute bursts of physical activity throughout the day are just as effective as longer periods of exercise. If you're pressed for time, try decompressing by taking a stroll on your lunch break, getting off a few transit stops early and walking, taking the stairs instead of the elevator or cycling to work. Remember to consult a physician before starting any new exercise program.

Talk it through. Keeping concerns bottled up can not only leave worries to eat away at you, they can sometimes cause you to perceive small problems as much larger. Sharing troubles with a colleague or friend can help you release stress and provide a fresh perspective on challenges. If you feel uncomfortable sharing these issues or that they're too overwhelming to unload on a friend or co-worker, consider seeking professional support.

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It's not always easy to stop stress from getting the better of you. But with a little self-awareness, a positive attitude and the right support, you can send chronic stress—and the physical and emotional baggage that goes with it—packing.