

## Relieving Stress and Anxiety

Sometimes, your emotions can trigger physical responses and urges in your body. For example, if you are nervous, you may feel your hands start to shake or sweat. Instead of focusing on getting rid of your anxiety and the physical responses that accompany it, try accepting them.

### How Stress Affects the Body

Emotional stress often causes tension or discomfort in the forehead, temples, neck, throat, jaw, shoulders, chest or abdomen. Most people feel one (or a combination) of these symptoms when they are stressed, while others experience numbness. At times, attempting to ignore or push these feelings away can worsen the discomfort. Instead of thinking about sweaty palms, shaking hands, stiff shoulders, a tight throat, or a quick heart rate as weaknesses, think of them as natural responses to your feelings.

### Developing Mindfulness

When you are experiencing pain or discomfort, take a minute to focus on it and ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I feel uncomfortable?
- Does it have a certain shape?
- What does it feel like?
- Does it move or stay in one place?

Breathe deeply and acknowledge your discomfort and its characteristics. Accept how you are feeling and take 10 slow, deep breaths. Recognize that the emotional discomfort you are experiencing is fleeting and that your body is simply responding to stress. Imagine your discomfort expanding and contracting as you breathe. As you go about the rest of your day, allow yourself the space to feel uncomfortable. Learning to accept your emotional discomfort as you are experiencing it will ease some of the anxiety and tension associated with the physical symptoms of stress.

It is important to remember that being uncomfortable is not a weakness. Just as laughter is a response to humor, discomfort is a response to stress. Both laughter and discomfort are natural responses to emotions.

Keep in mind that it is natural for physical symptoms of stress to come and go. Knowing that feelings of discomfort are temporary responses to stress will allow you to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

### Maintaining Calm

Lowering and controlling stress and anxiety levels takes regular practice. Keep in mind the following tips to help you:

**Talk about your feelings.** A good way to alleviate fear is to discuss it. Chat with a friend or family member, or take advantage of the help available through your Employee Assistance Program.

**Focus on what is important.** Playing with your children, for example, is more productive than watching all the news coverage of the world's woes. Focus your energy on what is important to you.

**Decide what you can and cannot control.** While it is smart to be aware of your surroundings and what is going on, dwelling on events out of your control can be detrimental.

**Reduce your stress.** Incorporate basic stress-reducing activities into your life, including exercise and leisure activities such as watching a movie or reading a book.

**Carry on with your daily life.** Disruptions caused by excessive worry will only increase stress levels for yourself and those around you. Adhere to your routine as much as possible.

**Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** Physical health plays a key role in keeping your mental health stable.

**Seek professional help.** If you are suffering from sleep or eating disruptions, talk with a professional. Start with your Employee Assistance Program, which can provide short-term counseling and refer you to resources for more intensive treatment.

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