

Understanding How to Balance Stress Through Exercise

The Stress Management Society defines stress as: “a situation where demands on a person exceed that person’s resources or ability to cope.”

There are many sources of stress in our modern lives and many studies recognize that exercise can act as a stress reliever.

- Exercise increases endorphins. Physical activity releases these chemicals that help your brain “feel good.”
- Exercise is meditation in motion. Physical activity can allow your mind to focus on what is important and forget the minor irritations of daily life.
- Exercise improves your mood. Physical activity can improve your sleep and lessen feelings of anxiety.

Beginning and Maintaining an Exercise Program

- If you haven’t exercised regularly, it may be best to speak with your doctor before starting a new routine.
 - Walk before you run. Start out slow and build up your fitness routine gradually. This will help you avoid injury or feeling overwhelmed and quitting.
 - Choose something you enjoy doing. Examples include: walking, jogging, yoga, tai chi, cycling, tennis, golfing, gardening, and swimming.
 - Enter your exercise time into your schedule as if it were an appointment. It is an appointment you are making for yourself.
 - Set realistic goals. Write down specific goals that are measureable, attainable and have a timeframe.
 - Find a friend to be an exercise buddy. Setting a time to walk with someone or meet them at the gym is a powerful incentive on following through with your exercise goals.
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Recent federal guidelines regarding exercise:

- For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 2 ½ hours a week of moderate-intensity exercise or 1 ¼ hour a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity.
- When older adults cannot do 2 ½ hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.
- When adults with disabilities are not able to meet the federal guidelines, they should engage in regular physical activity according to their abilities and should avoid inactivity.
- Adults with disabilities should consult their healthcare provider about the amounts and types of physical activity that are appropriate for their abilities.
- Adults with chronic conditions will obtain important health benefits from regular physical activity that is in agreement with the types and amounts of activity deemed appropriate by their physician.
- Children and adolescents should have 1 hour or more of physical activity daily. This should include primarily aerobic fitness as well as muscle strengthening and bone strengthening exercises.

Other ways to minimize stress beyond exercise:

- Learn to say 'no' to added tasks and responsibilities.
- Manage your time. Prioritize the tasks you need to do yourself, and identify what can be delegated to others. Determine timeframes for when tasks need to be completed and what tasks can be dropped from your list.
- Reject negative energy from your life. Let go of petty grudges and minor annoyances.
- Embrace activities that bring you joy: watch a sunset, take a walk in the woods, pet a dog, play with a kitten, re-read your favorite novel with a cup of tea, sing along with your favorite song, play a musical instrument, write a poem, pick some flowers, watch a comedy with friends, give a hug, take a bubble bath, fly a kite, sit at a sidewalk café and watch people walk by, take a nap, enjoy artwork, walk a labyrinth, meditate, visit the ocean, get a massage, go to bed on time.

Adapted from the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, the Mayo Clinic, and the Stress Management Society.
For more information visit: **www.health.gov** or **www.stress.org**
