

## How to Manage Stress

Stress is a disruption of homeostasis, our state of dynamic balance. Stressors knock us off balance, and trigger the stress response.

Stressors can be:

- Physical - substance abuse or lack of sleep
- Mental - anxious thoughts or multi-tasking
- Emotional – depression or fear
- Existential - feeling purposeless or hopeless
- Relational/social - unsupportive relationships or culture shock
- Environmental - pollution or disrupted light-dark cycles

Stressors are also cumulative. If one stressor hits, you might be able to stay balanced. However, if a bunch pile up, you might start to feel overwhelmed.

Our capacity for exercise and other stressors increases over time, so long as recovery is adequate, we will go back to homeostasis. This cycle of disruption, alarm, and recovery, is a normal reaction to stress. When it's working properly, the stress response helps us stay focused, energetic and alert.

However, if we exceed our ability to recover, stress stops helping and starts chronically damaging our bodies, performance, mood, productivity, relationships and quality of life.

Much of our behavior is in response to stress. It's often heard that bad habits are an attempt to cope with stress or solve a problem.

The intensity and duration of a stressor will impact our interpretation of it, as will our ability to recover from it. When we respond, recover, and adapt well, stress actually makes us better. When we don't respond or recover effectively, stress breaks us down. 1

How to manage stress levels:

- **Take breaks from the news and social media**
- **Take care of your body**
  - Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep per night
  - Eat mostly whole, unprocessed foods and protein
  - Exercise regularly
  - Meditate or journal daily
  - Avoid excess alcohol
  - Continue with routine preventive measures – mammograms, screenings, etc
- **Make time to unwind.** Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- **Talk to others.** Share your problems and how you are feeling and coping with a parent, friend, spouse or therapist