

Stress Awareness & Tips

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Introduction:

Did you know that April is Stress Awareness Month? Stress is something that we all face, and it can affect our health if we let it take over our lives. Luckily, understanding stress and knowing how to reduce it can help us through stressful times as well as learn to use stress to our advantage.

Stress Definition:

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), "Stress is how the brain and body respond to any demand." In fact, not all stress is bad. Good stress or optimal stress can be motivating and is our body's way of telling us that we need to push a little harder to get through difficult situations (e.g., deadlines at work, an exam, etc.). The problem comes when the stress is long-term, or a minor stressor is causing more stress than it should; if this happens finding a way to reduce negative stress can be beneficial (NIMH, n.d.).

Here are three evidence-based techniques that may help manage stress:

1. **Meditation** takes many forms. Setting aside quiet time to focus on your body and breathing has been proven to decrease stress (Varvogli & Darviri, 2011). Begin with brief guided meditations and then try new techniques, the key is to find what works best for you. You can find a more

detailed explanation and meditation exercises at mindful.org.

2. **Social Support** is an essential part of managing stress. There are two ways social support can help alleviate stress. First, when you feel stressed and overwhelmed, having friends and family to lean on or be a listening ear is an excellent way to relieve stress (NIMH, n.d.). You can also be the one to provide social support to someone, and that often gives a boost of happiness and fulfillment which helps combat stress (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019).
3. **Reframing** your thoughts into more positive ones is proven to reduce stress. You can positively reframe your thinking in multiple ways (Varvogli & Darviri, 2011). One way to reframe your thoughts is to look at the positive things that might come from the stressful situation (e.g., work deadline stress can be reframed as a new opportunity or by breaking a project into smaller pieces and accomplishing them you can find a sense of satisfaction along the way). You can also look for things you are learning from the stressful experience and if there is anything you can be grateful for from this experience (e.g., a new relationship may be stressful but provide additional support in the long run; Harvard University – Stress & Development Lab, n.d.).

Conclusion:

Stress is an inevitable part of life and can even be helpful at times, but when stress becomes too much, we can learn to be aware and work to reduce it. To relieve stress in your life, try some of the techniques above or check out the resources linked below.

Resources:

- [Positive Psychology – 62 Stress Management Techniques:](#)
- [Stress Awareness Month](#)
- [USU Extension - Stress Management](#)

References:

- American Psychological Association. (2019, November 1). *Healthy ways to handle life's stressors*. <http://www.apa.org/topics/stress/tips>
- Harvard University – Stress & Development Lab. (n.d.). *Positive Reframing and Examining the Evidence*. <https://sdlab.fas.harvard.edu/cognitive-reappraisal/positive-reframing-and-examining-evidence>.

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- National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). 5 *Things You Should Know about Stress*.<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>
 - Varvogli, L., & Darviri, C. (2011). Stress management techniques: Evidence-based procedures that reduce stress and promote health. *Health science journal*, 5(2), 74.