



Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services

2 Oak Street • Norwalk, Ohio 44857 • 419-681-6268

Stress Awareness & Management Strategies

Stress...it is a word we are all very familiar with and in these uncertain and ever-changing times, we are all experiencing various levels of stress. Stress is how the body reacts to any kind of demand, threat, or change being experienced. It is often associated with a feeling of being overwhelmed and it is important to note that stress is not a “one size fits all” concept. What stresses one person out may not faze the next person based on the way in which they perceive the stressor. And since stress is a normal part of human existence and nobody is immune to it, it’s important to arm ourselves with knowledge so that we recognize when stress rears its ugly head. The link below can help you recognize your personal stress warning signs and symptoms.

(<http://huroncountymhas.org/pics/Stress%20warning%20signs%20and%20symptoms.pdf>).

Stress can be debilitating. It can also cause and/or aggravate health problems. Stress Awareness is highlighted annually in the month of April and is an important time to learn what stress is and some strategies for coping with this particular silent menace. Recognizing Stress Awareness Month is important because honestly, we are all feeling it. A recent survey found that about two-thirds of U.S. workers report engaging in behavior such as drinking or crying regularly in order to deal with stress. These are not healthy coping skills and can lead to additional unhealthy behaviors and negatively affect our mental and emotional health. By recognizing Stress Awareness Month, we are taking the time to educate about the dangers of stress, learn successful coping strategies and pay closer attention to our overall health and wellbeing.

Below are a few “stressful” facts you need to know

- **Stress can help — sometimes**
 - According to the National Institute of Mental Health, “stress can motivate people to prepare or perform and might even be life-saving in some situations.”
- **It’s sickening — literally**
 - People under stress, especially those prone to chronic stress, are more susceptible to a variety of ailments, from headaches and insomnia to high blood pressure and heart disease.
- **Stressed? Here’s why**
 - A survey by the American Psychological Association found that the five factors most often cited as a source of stress were money, work, family, economic outlook, and relationships.

When chronic stress is not properly managed it can cause serious health effects including; increased blood pressure, suppressed and weakened immune system, greater risk of heart attacks and strokes and an increased chance of experiencing some form of mental or emotional health issues. Although we cannot avoid stress all together, we can manage how stress affects us. Below are some strategies to help manage stress.

Stress Management Strategies

#1: Avoid unnecessary stress: *Not all stress can be avoided, and it’s not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.*

- Learn how to say “no” – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you are close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- Avoid people who stress you out – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can’t turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- Take control of your environment – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic’s got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.



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- Avoid hot-button topics – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- Pare down your to-do list – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the "should" and the "musts". Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

#2: Alter the situation: *If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things, so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.*

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build, and the situation will likely remain the same.
- Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- Be more assertive. Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got a report due and your chatty spouse just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself; you can alter the amount of stress you're under.

#3: Adapt to the stressor: *If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.*

- Re-frame problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others and learn to be okay with "good enough".
- Focus on the positive. When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

#4: Accept the things you cannot change: *Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, a global pandemic, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.*

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control – particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- Look for the upside. As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- Share your feelings. Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.



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#5: Make time for fun and relaxation: *Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.*

- Set aside relaxation time. Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- Connect with others. Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- Do something you enjoy every day. Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- Keep your sense of humor. This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

Healthy ways to relax and recharge:

- Go for a walk
- Spend time in nature
- Call a good friend
- Have a good workout
- Write in your journal
- Savor a cup of coffee or tea
- Play with a pet
- Work in your garden
- Curl up with a good book
- Light scented candles
- Take a long bath
- Listen to music
- Watch a comedy
- Get a massage

#6: Adopt a healthy lifestyle: *You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.*

- Exercise regularly. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand, deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

If you feel you need further assistance in managing your stress and would like to seek professional help, below is a list of MHAS contracted treatment providers in Huron County:

- Family Life Counseling & Psychiatric Service: 567-560-3584
- Firelands Counseling & Recovery Services: 419-663-3737
- NAMI Huron County (local support group): 419-677-0714/ [facebook.com/NAMIHuronCounty](https://www.facebook.com/NAMIHuronCounty)

Sources: <https://www.stress.org/stress-awareness-month-april-2020>

<https://www.hcbmhas.org/resources>