

How To Deal with Stress and Anxiety

By Mark Beardslee

Most of us deal with stress and anxiety on a daily basis. A person who can remain stress-free in all situations is extraordinarily uncommon because anxiety and stress are perfectly normal human responses to external conditions. It's how we handle stress that can either make it worse or make it work for us.

Many readers will think this is much easier to say than to do. For many, anxiety can become overwhelming, interfering with work, relationships, leisure and sleep. Make sure you do not suffer from a condition that requires medical intervention. Many of us have heard about someone who thought they were having a heart attack being rushed to the hospital and told they had "only" had a panic attack. While a panic attack is not life threatening, it can feel like it when you're having one. If your level of stress or anxiety has ever been this severe, seek medical attention. This article is not meant as a substitute for professional diagnosis and/or treatment.

For most people, everyday stress and anxiety can be handled without the need for medicines, medical specialists or therapy. Here are some suggestions for how to decrease the level of stress and anxiety in your life:

- **Relaxation techniques** – Doctors the world over prescribe this as a first line of defense against stress. There are many different ways of training oneself to relax. Check out a self-help book from the library or visit a licensed massage therapist and ask him or her for suggestions.
- **Exercise** – Exercise can go a long way toward eliminating stress associated with the daily grind of managing work, family and social responsibilities. Set aside 15 or 20 minutes each day, or longer periods two or three times a week, for your favorite exercise. There is no right or wrong, but many professionals suggest a combination of aerobic and anaerobic exercise. Make it something you enjoy so you won't avoid doing it.
- **Diet** – Just as with exercise, taking your meals on a regular schedule can help alleviate stress. Eat sensibly, avoiding caffeine, excessive sugar and alcohol. Try to set aside the same time each day for your meals and relax when you eat. Don't rush through a meal or eat on the run.
- **Sleep** – It is vital that you get a full night's sleep (7 to 8 hours) every night. Those all-night study sessions may have worked in our college days but as we age, establishing a regular sleeping pattern becomes increasingly important to our overall health and can help reduce stress and anxiety throughout the day. Don't oversleep because this can make it difficult to focus on your day and cause you to rush, which is a sure way to increase stress. A good way to reduce stress is to get up well before you have any obligations and spend some time relaxing, or even exercising, before planning your day.

- **Plan your day** – It's true that many psychiatrists with patients who claim that they feel as if their brains are over stimulated advise them to take some deep breaths and make a list of things that need to be done in the order they need to be done. This can help make your work and personal life seem less frantic. It can also help you become more organized, both at work and at home. The less disorganized you are externally, the less disarray you feel internally.
- **Meditation** – therapists and healers still commonly use this ancient practice across the world. As with relaxation, there are dozens of approaches. Find one that works for you.
- **Natural foods and vitamins** – Increasingly, doctors are realizing that there is merit to “alternative” treatments for some ailments. Visit your area's health food store, explain your symptoms and ask the helpful staff for advice.
- **Yoga** – This is a mind/body form of exercise that focuses your attention on moving your body into and out of various natural positions. Its physical component can be excellent exercise and, by disciplining your body, mental and emotional peace can replace anxiety and stress. Once again, there are different forms of yoga. Ask the advice of a medical professional, check if your local hospital has a yoga program, or seek out a certified yoga instructor in your community.

Stress and anxiety can seem like crosses we must bear in the modern world. However, with a little attention, some discipline and a few lifestyle changes, these burdens can be lifted.