Dear Alice,

I was wondering what the number one cause of stress is and the best way to relieve it?

? Worried Already

Answer

Dear Worried Already,

Rest assured, you’re not alone ? people of all ages experience stress at some point during their lives. Since people have different stressors and experience stress differently, it’s difficult to pinpoint or rank the number one cause. But, it might actually surprise you that stress can be beneficial ? and in some cases critical ? in helping individuals respond and adapt to new situations in life (i.e., when a zebra needs to escape the jaws of a hungry lion). Stress is a fact of life for humans and animals alike, so while getting rid of it might not necessarily be possible, no need to stress! There are certainly strategies you can employ to manage it.

Sources of stress can be as minor as sitting in traffic or getting excited about a friend visiting or they can be due to bigger life events such as moving to a new place/city or getting married. The bottom line is that sources of stress ? both good and bad, big and small ? are everywhere. And while managing stress may seem impossible at times, there are strategies you can use on a day-to-day basis that can help you cope with this ever-present response:

- **Time management** [2] = self-management. Make prioritized lists of tasks you need to accomplish during the day. Prepare these lists before you go to bed or just after you wake up.
- **Find your happy space.** Try to create a calm, relaxing, and organized living environment. You can even build “quiet hours” into your schedule when you don’t take phone calls or visitors. If you live in a shared space like a residence hall, finding your happy place may be particularly challenging.
- **Eat a healthy, varied diet** [3], [3] which will load you up with energy and help you get your recommended nutrients, vitamins, and minerals.
- **Incorporate physical activity** [4] into your daily routine. Exercise provides time to clear your head and stay physically fit. Those who are regularly physically active also report more energy and improved concentration.
- **Get plenty of sleep** so your body is better prepared to deal with daily life.
- **Employ basic relaxation techniques**, such as yoga [5], breathing exercises, meditation [6]
tai chi [7], mindfulness, or simply being in nature.

- **Seek support.** If you’re a student, your school may offer tutoring services and other forms of academic support. Don’t hesitate to reach out to your academic advisor or counselor for referrals to these services.

Remember Worried Already, whichever strategies or combinations of strategies you use, find the ones that help you feel a bit more calm and prepared to take on what lies ahead for you. Some offices or university counseling centers may even offer stress or time management courses; if not, check out your local community center to see what they offer. You may even consider speaking with your health care provider, or seeing a therapist [8] who specializes in stress management. It’s unlikely that you can totally eliminate stress from your life, but properly managing stress can help you make the most out of every day.

Breathe easy,

Alice!

Category:
Emotional Health [9]
Stress & Anxiety [10]

**Related questions**

Stress, anxiety, and learning to cope [11]
Must. Be. Productive. But I’m so stressed out! [12]
Uncomfortable with college stresses [13]

**Resources**

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [14]
Alice! Health Promotion (Morningside) [15]
Stressbusters (Morningside) [16]
a!Sleep website [17]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [18]
Center for Student Wellness (CUMC) [19]

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Links