

## WAYS TO DEAL WITH STRESS

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Although COVID-19 is our major concern at this time, dealing with stress has been a daily struggle for some. This is because stress always affects our life in a negative way.



So, what is stress? Stress is a normal physical response that happens when you feel threatened or upset, when you feel that you are in danger, whether it is real or imagined.

Before the pandemic our lives were already full of challenges: relationship crises, financial losses, work

Stress is more than a feeling. Understanding stress can help you deal with it. It can even lead to an improvement in your mood and how you think.

related torments, school-related problems, illnesses and many more. But it was way easier to live then. In those days if you felt sad you could just go to the mall, window shop, watch a movie, meet up with your friends and eat, travel with your family, engage in creative activities like cooking, painting, playing musical instruments etc.

But today our lives are so confined. Our movements are so restricted. Rich or poor, we are all alike now in these seemingly iron-walled boundaries. This has made life miserable and distressing to most of us. And for most Filipinos, life is getting worse by the day because of stress. What are the signs of stress? Emotions or feelings. You're anxious about everything, afraid of what might happen in the future, angry or aggressive (thinking of revenge scenarios), sad (lacking energy in almost everything), irritable or easily agitated even for minor things, having panic attacks, forgetful, thinking intensely, lacking motivation, insecure, frustrated or feeling hopeless, worthless, guilty and depressed (lacking interest in almost everything).

Body reactions. Hot flashes, dry throat, increased urination, headaches, nausea, indigestion, digestive problems such as bloating or diarrhea, shallow breathing or hyperventilating, sweating, chest pain or a feeling like your heart is racing, muscle aches, neck and shoulder pains, jaw clenching.

Behavioral changes. Neglecting hygiene, poor appearance, withdrawing from other people or snapping at them, indecisiveness or inflexibility, tearful (increased frequency of crying), prob-

lems getting to sleep or staying asleep, sexual problems like inability to have sex or participating compulsively in sex, increased shopping or internet browsing, increased smoking, alcohol binging and drug taking, gambling, overeating or developing an eating disorder, nail biting, increased and aggressive talking.

If the stress lasts long enough, you may notice that sleep and memory are affected, your eating habits change or you feel less inclined to exercise and engage in activities that you used to participate in. Some research also links long-term stress to gastrointestinal conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or stomach ulcers, as well as conditions like cardiovascular disease.

All of us can probably recognize some of the feelings described above. Some people seem to be more affected by stress than others. For some people getting out of the door on time each morning can be a very stressful experience, whereas others may be less affected by a great deal of pressure.

Some people are more likely to experience stressful situations than others, like those with a lot of debt or financial insecurity, people from minority ethnic groups or who are LGBTIQ (stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer or questioning), and people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. How can you help yourself if you're stressed? Recognize when stress does exist. When you seem hopeless like you no longer want to talk to anyone, or when you cannot eat or sleep or concentrate on your work, it's time to seek a professional's help! Do not ignore physical warning signs such as tense muscles, feeling always tired, headaches or migraine and the above symptoms.

Stop worrying and think about where you can make changes in your current situation. Think of the solution and not the problem.

Reach out for support from friends or family. Discuss your problem with the people closest to you.

Joining a club or a course can help expand your resources. Activities like volunteering can change your perspective and have a beneficial impact on your mood.

Make healthy lifestyle changes. Exercise, eat healthy foods and get some restful sleep.

Avoid engaging in bad behavior like gambling, smoking and alcohol.

Practice mental training. Meditate to slow down racing thoughts, let go of negativity and calm your mind and body. Combine meditation with the practice of mindfulness, which can be defined as a mental state that involves being fully focused on the "now" so you can acknowledge and accept your thought, feelings, and sensations without judgement.

Be kind to yourself. This is most important. Remember that you will always be loved, no matter who you are, and that there is always a God who will provide you with your needs and Who will never leave you alone.

Get professional help if necessary. Stress is more than a feeling. Understanding stress can help you deal with it. It can even lead to an improvement in your mood and how you think.

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