

## Stress busters

NT News · 19 Oct 2022 · 34 · MARGIE IRELAND Margie Ireland is a psychologist and author of *The Happy Healthy Leader – Achieve Your Potential Even During a Crisis*. Visit [margieireland.com](http://margieireland.com)

### SIX WAYS TO BUILD A HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MIND



Many of us have experienced high levels of stress in the past two years. Insights from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020-21 report revealed 15 per cent of Australians experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress and

3.4 million Australians saw a health professional for their mental health.

While it's promising that more people are seeking help to better manage stress, many still feel a sense of shame or failure for needing help with their mental health for fear of it impacting their career.

Believing you "should" be able to cope, is relating to your stress with critical judgment and negativity.

You are better off learning to relate to your stress with curiosity and kindness, which can loosen the hold your stress has over your mind, and body.

Somewhere along the way we have learnt that stress is bad, and we need to get rid of it as soon as possible.

We need stress, otherwise we wouldn't get out of bed in the morning to go to work so we have a roof over our heads and food to eat.

This is called Eustress and positively impacts motivation and performance.

Distress is the negative type of stress, that we tend to just call “stress”. Distress tends to appear when we feel we no longer have the skills, resources or support to cope.

Here are six steps to help you build a healthier relationship with stress.

### 1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

Learn the signals for when you start to go into distress. This can be your heart beating faster, pressure in your head, or a sense of being overwhelmed.

This is okay, and very normal. Rather than fight against these sensations, take three slow, deep breaths, let yourself know or say to yourself, “It’s okay I am feeling like this”, and refocus towards what you were doing before you noticed feeling stress.

### 2. SHAME VERSUS UNCOMFORTABLE THOUGHTS

Recognise the difference between shame and uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

Even if you don’t want to admit to someone else you are not coping, admit it to yourself, and with some kindness and acceptance. You are human after all. Without uncomfortable feelings like worry, frustration and stress we cannot appreciate the more comfortable feelings of joy, success and calm.

### 3. MOVE YOUR BODY

Physical activity stimulates hormones that help mediate distress, and not just after the workout. Twenty to 30 minutes of intense exercise such as jogging on a treadmill, cycling, swimming, running, aerobic type class, can also help to sustain a more positive mood over the day.

### 4. PRACTISE GRATITUDE

Try writing down three things you are grateful for every day. It can be as simple as your first coffee, patting your pet, seeing the sunshine, a cuddle with a loved one.

Those of you with kids might like to try this at mealtime and go around the table, where everyone has to share at least one thing they are grateful for.

Gratitude and stress struggle to live together in your mind.

### 5. TRY MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is no longer just for yogis. Google, Nike and Apple have incorporated mindfulness into their employee wellbeing programs, and these companies and others are realising a reduction in employee stress, improved focus, clarity of thinking, better decision-making and performance.

Mindfulness helps relax us in the moment but over time (usually 10 minutes a day over eight weeks) helps us build resilience towards negative thinking about ourselves and the world. I often call this our kryptonite for stress.

### 6. GET SUPPORT

This can be a friend, mentor, GP, counsellor or coach. There is NO shame in asking for help.

In fact, asking for help demonstrates

courage, self-awareness and a willingness to not only improve resilience for yourself, but you are also leading by example.

Building a healthier relationship with stress can positively impact your performance at work and home. It’s just up to you to change it.