

- Longevity / Life expectancy

Expert advice on reducing and coping with adversity

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Extending a healthy lifespan and building psychological resilience start with reducing and managing stress in your life. Here are eight ways to achieve that.

1. Develop cognitive reappraisal skills

You may not be able to change the situation that is causing you stress, but you can reframe its meaning and significance, Dr Quinney Chan says. When you change your interpretation of an event, your emotional response to it changes, too. “Look for the silver lining in every bad situation and ask yourself what you can learn. Stress and difficulty aren’t signs of failure – they can be stepping stones to happiness and success.”

2. Avoid “catastrophising”

People who are less resilient to stress tend to focus only on what went or might go wrong, Chan says. “They may underestimate their abilities and overestimate the negatives. They might have trouble saying no and are more likely to overcompensate in the hope of minimising uncertainty and avoiding negative consequences.”

3. Exercise regularly

“Exercise relaxes our mind and body as it releases endorphins, ‘feel-good’ hormones that improve your sense of well-being,” says Hafsa Khan, an alternative medicine practitioner from Balance Health in Hong Kong. Workouts that involve a training partner, such as martial arts, are also ideal, as they require you to make social connections, which also helps to reduce stress.

4. Confide in others

A good support system is essential to strong psychological health. When you feel overwhelmed, share your feelings with a trusted friend or family member, Khan advises. “Sharing your problems lessens the emotional burden and helps you see things from a different perspective. If you prefer not to talk to anyone, write down your thoughts in a journal or talk to yourself out loud.”

5. Learn to say no

Learning to say no to others is one way to set boundaries – it teaches you to value yourself more, conserves your emotional energy, prevents burnout, and gives you a sense of control over how you live and spend your time.

6. Connect with your spiritual side

Most people living in Blue Zones – places in the world where people live the longest, and are healthiest – tend to belong to a faith-based community or engage in spiritual practices regularly. Studies have shown the positive impact of religious or spiritual practice on mental health – it helps manage stress and anxiety, creates a sense of inner peace and of purpose and meaning, and generates feelings of connection with others. Meditation has the same effect.

7. Get sufficient quality sleep

“Sleep is the first thing we sacrifice when we’re stressed, but a lack of sleep worsens stress and makes us feel irritable,” Khan says. We need at least eight hours of quality sleep every night, to recharge the mind and body, and boost stress management.

8. Laugh more

Laughter helps build positive emotions, relax muscles and relieve physical tension. Look for ways to laugh every day, whether watching funny videos, sharing jokes with friends or playing with children. Sasha Gonzales