

## Stress: steps to take on coping, then overcoming it

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STRESS has been identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the most significant health problems in the 21st century, and is still a growing concern.

We know stress is a normal part of our daily lives, but how can stress be described? It is simply the way the brain and body respond to any of our demands.

As life stressors or challenges happen, the demand arises from one or more of the following life stressors. This can include the sudden loss of a loved one, job loss, divorce or a traumatic life event, among other things. At some point in our lives, we are bound to experience a high level of stress due to these unforeseen life-altering stressors.

While stress can be a motivator for personal growth, having too much stress can lead to mental health stressors. Studies find significant amounts of stress can come from any event that leaves you frustrated, nerve wrecked or out of control. However, its effects often vary from person to person despite similar circumstances, as some individuals do not feel pressured while others may be severely impacted.

But how much stress is too much?

To determine if your stress levels are too high, ask yourself the following questions: Do you find yourself feeling irritable or upset when confronted with trivial issues? Have difficulty focusing on the present moment? Do you struggle to concentrate during work hours? Do you suffer from overwhelming feelings? Do you crave unhealthy foods when overwhelmed? Struggle to fall asleep? Experience headaches or muscle tension? Avoid interacting with family or acquaintances? Is there a sudden increase in bad habits with a sudden urge to indulge in alcohol, substance use or other drugs to self-soothe?

If you relate to these questions, understand stress appears unique for each individual.

This depends on the individual's perspective on a life event and their self-knowledge of resources to handle it. Individuals often avoid seeking professional support as they fear their concerns will not be deemed legitimate or severe enough to call for professional guidance.

There are multiple reasons why differences among individuals exist, particularly in how people perceive reality and how they respond to different stimuli they are exposed to. Stress symptoms are aggravated when individuals believe that a certain life event surpasses their available coping mechanisms. Note, this constant flow of stress hormones in the body can result in illnesses.

Developed and advanced coping styles have the ability to effectively manage stress.

Each individual must be carefully equipped to adapt to be flexible and stable in order to survive.

New discoveries suggest that resilience is the process of successfully coping with high levels of stress. We may not be born with resilience, but it can be learned and developed by

anyone. Become proficient in the necessary skills to create and execute realistic plans, adopt a positive view of yourself, and build confidence in your strengths, communication and problem-solving abilities by relying on your own instinct.

Avoid looking at challenges as insurmountable issues. Looking beyond the present and focusing on the future may be a better option. Recognise that change is an integral aspect of life. Create a new path by learning to accept circumstances that cannot be changed, which can help you focus on the circumstances you can change.

Establish realistic goals and divide them into smaller attainable goals. Taking decisive actions is the way to avoid detaching yourself from problems and wishing they disappear. Try to think of your stress factors as an opportunity to discover yourself. Gain a stronger sense of strength with a heightened appreciation of life. Despite stressful circumstances, maintain a hopeful outlook. Adopting an optimistic perspective will allow you to look forward to good things that can potentially happen for you.

While going through a tough mix of stressors, take care of yourself. Make time to unwind. Be attentive to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities you find enjoyable and relaxing, which include exercise, entertainment and hobbies. Coping well with stress factors requires an urgent need to take control of your life.

Develop a personalised approach to effectively managing stress, time and lifestyle. Taking time to rest from watching, reading or listening to new stories, including those on social media, is essential.

Use positive coping strategies to better handle stressors and bounce back faster from tough times instead of blaming or being unreasonable. Communicating your thoughts to supportive people can be a powerful tool for managing stress.

Emotion-focused coping techniques are designed to help the more reserved individuals adjust their emotional responses to stress factors through meditation and relaxation. More awareness is crucial for every small step we take and can only build cumulatively over time, drawing meaningful insight about your own stressful event.