



Managing Stress **By Gabe Avila**

Life can be full of stressors. Work, family, pets, politics, health...The list is endless. But what can we do to handle that stress? Below are only some of the things that people find useful when managing stress.

Be active

Exercise, even going on a ten minute walk on a lunch break, is statistically shown to have a positive effect on your mood. Exercise and other physical activity releases endorphins, a hormone that blocks pain and acts as a sedative. Studies show regular exercise improves mood, helps with sleep, and has a number of other effects including making you healthier.¹

Spiritual Practices

Some people find prayer, meditation, and other spiritual practices relaxing. These look different for everyone and what might help someone else might not help you so don't be discouraged if something you try doesn't fit for you. If you don't have a spiritual practice you do regularly, perhaps try a few out. Walk the labyrinth, go to a healing service, pray quietly, pick up a prayer shawl, go outside and focus your mind on being peaceful and quiet. There are many guided meditations available online if you search. Perhaps listen to a few and see if they suit you. My particular favorite is imagining the perfect stream in a forest and visualizing leaves floating down the river. When a stressful thought comes up, imagine putting the thought on a leaf and watching it float down the river.

Support Network

A support network of friends, family, and community groups such as churches or common interest groups can help you immensely. Reach out to them. Being alone and dealing with particularly difficult stressors can be very challenging. Your support network is there to listen and support you, even if it just means talking about something else for a little bit or going or doing something fun together. You don't have to be alone.

Boundaries

Some stressors are out of our control, but some are things we have control over. Sometimes, we take on more than we can handle. Sometimes we say yes when we really don't want to. Being able to set boundaries can lower your stress level especially in these situations. Be selective about the things you choose to do and learn to say no when appropriate.

Techniques

There are a lot of techniques that help with stress, such as mindfulness (the practice of staying present) and deep breathing. One way to practice mindfulness is to pause and name five things you can hear, see, touch, taste, or smell at that particular moment. Mindfulness helps keep you focused on the present and not the stressors surrounding you. Deep breathing is similar, but focuses on breathing only.

Other

Listen to music, write in a journal either about what is causing stress or write a thankfulness journal about the things you are thankful for, cook, read a book, play with your pets or kids if you have them, or enjoy nature...

What other things can you think of?