

Feeling stressed

Parenting is stressful

Stress is a normal reaction to changes and challenges, like those that come with being a parent. Some stress can be helpful, giving you the motivation and focus to face challenges and get things done. But too much stress can be overwhelming, making it difficult to cope with everyday tasks.

Why is managing stress important?

If you have too much stress, you might end up getting sick – for example, headaches, sleep problems, digestive problems or the feeling that you just cannot cope. Too much stress is not good for your health. It can also make it hard to look after your children and enjoy everyday family life. If stress is an issue for you, it is good to know some stress management techniques.

Signs that you might be stressed

In a stressful moment, your heart rate might go up, your breathing might get faster, and your muscles might tense up. Sometimes these short-term stress reactions can actually help you deal with stressful situations. But if you keep going at this speed, your body will get exhausted.

So, it is important to watch out for these signs of stress:

- worrying about absolutely everything.
- finding it hard to be tolerant with your spouse or children.
- having trouble sleeping.
- headaches or other aches and pains.
- not wanting to get out of bed in the morning.
- having thoughts like ‘I’m never going to get out of this mess’.
- drinking too much alcohol, smoking or using drugs.

Tips to manage stress

Get to know what makes you stressed

If you know what your stress triggers are, it can be easier to deal with stress. You might be able to avoid stressful situations or prepare yourself. A useful exercise is to write down what makes you feel stressed.

Positive thinking and self-talk

Unhelpful thinking makes it harder to deal with stressful things – for example, in a stressful situation you might think, ‘What’s wrong with me? I can’t get things together’. Realistic, helpful thinking and positive self-talk are good ways to deal with stress. Here are some ideas:

- Challenge unhelpful thoughts about things that cause you stress. For example, if your child cries in the supermarket, you might think, ‘Everyone will think I’m a bad parent’. But you could ask yourself, ‘Would I think this about someone else if their child was crying?’
- Be realistic about what you can do. For example, it might be too much to expect your child never to cry in the supermarket.
- Develop positive self-talk statements that help you. For example, you could say to yourself, ‘The shopping won’t take much longer – I can get through it’.

Focus on what’s essential

Stress often means you are trying to do too much, so try setting realistic goals for your day. Making a plan can help you feel more on top of things and less stressed. And if you have some large tasks to deal with, they might be more manageable if you break them down into smaller chunks. You might also be able to ask for some help from family or friends.

Stay connected with others

Talking things over with your spouse or a friend can help you keep things in perspective. If you find it hard to talk, you could try using a diary to record your thoughts and feelings.

Spending some time with friends can be a real help too. Even meeting for a quick coffee can be enough, because sharing worries can help you feel supported and better able to cope.

Make physical and emotional health a priority

Avoid stimulants like cigarettes and caffeine, and depressants like alcohol if you can.

Look after your physical health by eating well, getting some exercise, and making time for rest. Sometimes a brisk walk around the block or a quick nap can change your mood.

If you are working long hours, think about whether there are ways you could cut down or make work more flexible.

It can be easy to forget time for yourself. Try to do one thing you enjoy every couple of days. Having fun with your spouse and family might also be on your list.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [The happiest toddler on the block](#)
- [Ignore it! how selectively looking the other way can decrease behavioral problems and increase parenting satisfaction](#)
- [Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting](#)