

How to Manage Stress and Anxiety

According to the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#), anxiety is the most common mental health condition in the United States. The [American Institute of Stress](#) reports that 55% of Americans are stressed throughout the day - 20% more than the global average!

When stress and anxiety are not managed, it can take a toll on us both [physically and emotionally](#), increasing the likelihood of depression, high blood pressure, and heart attacks, as well as compromising our immune function.

With [41% of Americans](#) reporting feeling more anxious in 2021 than the year before, it is clear that stress and anxiety are affecting us more than ever before. Continue reading to learn how incorporating small changes into your everyday self-care routine can help with managing stress and anxiety!

Eat Healthy Foods

- Well-balanced meals with protein, fiber, healthy fats, complex carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins and minerals
- It is also important to stay hydrated as well
- Limit alcohol, caffeine, and sugar as these can affect our energy and mood
- Contact a registered dietitian for personalized advice on meal planning, nutrition, and supplementation

The benefits of a healthy diet according to Harvard research and the Cleveland Clinic:

- Supports immune function
- Increased energy helps in coping with stress and anxiety
- Balances blood sugar, which has a positive effect on stress, anxiety, and depression
- Supports brain function, including improved concentration and focus

Good Sleep Habits

“[Sleep hygiene](#)” refers to the habits that you can practice every day to ensure you get a restful night of sleep. Sleep is necessary for both physical and mental health, so ensure you are setting yourself up for a good night of sleep with these simple tips.

- Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day trains your brain and body to know when is time to be awake and when is time to sleep

- Cultivate a healthy sleep environment: a cool, comfortable temperature and keeping your room as dark and quiet as possible
- No screens at least 1 hour before bed. Our screens emit blue light which can interfere with our circadian rhythms and impact our quality of sleep. Turn your devices to silent and store them away from your bed while you are sleeping.
- Using your bed only for sleep (no tv, work, social media, etc.) also helps our brains to [associate our beds only with sleep](#)
- Develop a bedtime routine to help you start to relax and tell your brain it's time to rest. Examples include reading, stretching, and using relaxation techniques to relieve stress (more on those below!)
- Just [30 minutes](#) of exercise can improve sleep quality. Make sure to exercise at least a couple of hours before bedtime so your workout doesn't impact your ability to fall asleep

Developing healthy sleep habits is an important part of an overall self-care routine that can help us cope with anxiety and stress in our everyday lives. It can also help with dealing with conditions like anxiety and depression, which can greatly impact our sleep.

Exercise

The American Heart Association recommends that adults get [150 minutes](#) of moderate aerobic exercise per week. This could look like 30 minutes of exercise, five days per week, or several 10-minute sessions each day. Make sure to build up to this and check in with your doctor if you have any health conditions.

There are lots of ways to get exercise, and it's important to choose something that you enjoy doing. Examples include:

- Running, jogging, or walking
- Lifting weights
- Biking
- Swimming
- Playing a sport like tennis
- Dancing or practicing yoga
- Other activities like gardening or taking the stairs rather than the elevator - every bit counts!

Incorporating exercise into your self-care routine can relieve stress and help you to cope with anxiety and depression by [boosting endorphins](#) (those feel-good brain hormones). Exercise also helps with sleep, energy levels, and of course physical fitness.

Stress Reduction Techniques

Relaxation Techniques

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing can help to relax your mind, [regulate the nervous system](#), and relieve stress. One technique to guide you while you take deep breaths is called “square” or “[box breathing](#)”. This technique is powerful enough that it has been used with athletes, Navy Seals, and first responders, yet is simple enough to teach to young children.

How does it work? Sit in a relaxed position with your feet flat on the floor and sit up straight. If possible, it’s preferable to do this in a quiet, relaxed room.

1. Exhale to empty your lungs for a count of 4 seconds.
2. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose for a count of 4 seconds. Notice your belly rise.
3. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.
5. Repeat the process as many times as needed.

This technique is called “box breathing” or “square breathing” because it can be helpful to visualize the sides of a square while completing this exercise. The video below is a great guide to help you learn this technique!

 [Square Breathing – Guided](#)

Other Relaxation Techniques

- [5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique](#), which is effective for anxiety and stress
- [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#), which can help with relaxation and sleep

Talk to a Healthcare Provider

If you are concerned about your mental health or are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression, help is available. You may want to start by contacting your primary care provider.

Primary Care Physician

- Can rule out any physical health conditions
- Can diagnose and recommend treatments for depression and anxiety disorders

- Can refer you to a registered counselor for further support

Registered Counselor

- Can help you learn tools and techniques to manage stress and anxiety, develop coping skills and routines, and set boundaries in your work and personal life
- You don't have to have a mental health diagnosis to go to therapy and you don't have to wait until things are "bad enough". Therapy can benefit everyone.

Managing stress and anxiety can feel daunting - but there are simple changes that you can make to your everyday self-care routine that can relieve stress and help you to cope with anxiety. You can choose one area to start with and slowly build up a solid self-care routine. Focus on eating healthy foods, practicing stress-reduction relaxation techniques, and getting regular exercise and good quality sleep.