

# Tips for Managing Stress

All of us experience stress — the physical, mental or emotional tension that can make us short-tempered, unsociable or unwell. We might doubt ourselves and feel run down, struggle professionally and at home. But there are ways to manage your stress and even use it as a force for good, an especially important skill during times of change and transition.

To start, you must understand the causes and consequences of your tension and be realistic about your own influence, according to experts at a recent NextGen online training titled “Overcome the Overwhelm: How to Manage Stress.” Here are other insights from their conversation.

## 7 Ways to Handle Stress

### □ Identify your triggers.

It's OK if other people are unbothered by your stressors: No two individuals are on the same life journey.

### □ Let people know you're stressed.

Bottling your feelings encourages passive-aggressive behavior, and that causes its own problems.

### □ Know the limits of your control.

Acknowledging what's beyond your power will ease the stress of trying to fix something you can't. Control is often an illusion.

### □ Develop a routine and plan for the expected.

With a schedule, you'll have more energy and ability to respond to the unknown.

### □ Give yourself some grace.

You've been stressed in the past, you're stressed today and you'll be stressed in the future. That's normal.

### □ Don't disparage yourself or chase the allure of something better.

Be comfortable in yourself. Trying to improve is good; denigrating yourself is bad.

### □ Appreciate the upside of stress.

Similar to physical exercise, intentional stress can make us stronger.

## Speakers

### Victoria L. Bowens

Director, Strategic and Community Engagements, DoD Office for Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity Policy

### Brian Wilson

Organizational Change Management Lead, SEC

### Mika Cross

Transformational Workforce Expert

### Garth Katto Smelser

Mindful FED Founder/Federal Executive Institute Faculty Chair, Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

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“A lot of us move towards chronic stress and burnout because we have not fully accepted who we are, full stop. There is always this sense of something out there is going to make me happy: a job, a relationship, an accomplishment, more knowledge.... You have to stop and say, ‘I am not broken, there's nothing to fix.’”

— *Mika Cross*

“We like to go through life thinking that, ‘oh, I have influence over this and that.’ And really, that's just our ego speaking to us, and trying to [reinforce] our sense of being able to navigate the world. [But] what do we ultimately have control over? There's only one thing, and that's our mindset.”

— *Garth Katto Smelser*

## Have You Tried These Tactics?

- |                                                         |                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meditation                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working out                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chatting with friends          | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet time alone        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking a walk                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Praying                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing an instrument   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing games                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Looking out the window  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting more sleep      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support groups/<br>counselling | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy eating          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Journaling                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Spending time with pets |

**Tip:** Your insurance may cover therapists, counselors, coaches and other resources to help you manage stress, and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) also can help you navigate difficult times.

**When You're an Introvert**...new situations can be particularly stressful, especially if they're mandatory. Here's proven advice for being bold.

- 1. Build confidence in advance** — Wear clothes you like, a color you look good in, jewelry that empowers you. Play your favorite music. Take deep breaths, or tense your muscles and relax them. Look at yourself in a mirror and smile.
- 2. Mentally reframe the situation** — You may be uncomfortable, but how would a confident person act? Think about someone you know, or even (seriously) a superhero.
- 3. Start slowly** — Find someone you have something in common with and start the conversation slowly. Avoid going in big. Hold a drinking glass to feel more secure.
- 4. Embrace the discomfort** — The more you try, the less awkward you should feel. After a while, the unknown (e.g., the environment you're entering) will be the most unsettling aspect of a stressful event, and that may be comforting in itself.

"You can't necessarily put everybody in a specific box. Some of the challenge is recognizing what you can control and what you cannot. And part of that is knowing yourself and the environment that you're in. If you ... know it's stressful, how do you remove yourself from that environment? How do you prepare yourself to go into it?"

— Victoria Bowens

## Stress Self-Evaluation

How can you tell when you're overwhelmed?

What causes you the most stress?

On a scale of 1 (**abysmal**) to 10 (**excellent**), how good are you at managing pressure?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

**Although symptoms can be similar, stress, burnout and depression are unique conditions:**

**Stress:** A state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation; can lead to or exacerbate medical conditions.

**Burnout:** Long-term, unmanaged or unresolved stress — situation-specific and often related to work.

**Depression:** A clinical diagnosis for how someone thinks, behaves and feels — beyond work-related factors.

"There are memos and regulations that drive a lot of our overall project schedules. But some ... due dates are arbitrary dates that just seem to be good. And so [if] we drive to that date and miss it, there was really no true impact to the mission. But because we set that date in stone arbitrarily, [we created] self-manufactured stress."

— Brian Wilson

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