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Stop Stressing Out

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, but not all stress is bad stress. Some stress helps keep us motivated and performing well—but we all have a point where stress can become overwhelming. The good news is that we can learn stress management skills and build our resilience to adapt and recover from whatever life throws at us.

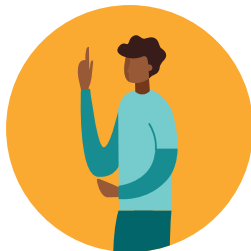
Using the 4A's of Stress Management

Since we can't avoid stress or uncomfortable feelings, building our resilience can help us recognize our stressors earlier, respond to them in healthier ways and proactively take steps to manage them.

This worksheet presents 4A's of stress management: Awareness, Acceptance, Adjustment and Action. These strategies can help when your stress levels are high.¹ You can also use them to build resilience even when things aren't stressful—that way, you'll be better equipped when life throws you a curveball.



Awareness



Acceptance



Adjustment



Action





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Awareness

Understand and anticipate the kinds of things that cause you to feel stress.

Know your automatic responses to stress: how do you feel in your body, what emotions are triggered, how do you respond, feel and act?

Is anything causing you to feel negative stress right now? Use the list of common job-related stressors below to help identify what the source(s) of your stress might be.^{2,3}

- Low job security** – you feel your position is not secure or that you may lose your job.
- Inadequate pay and benefits** – you feel the job you are doing doesn't match how much you earn or the benefits you receive.
- Low physical or psychological safety** – you feel there are things about your work environment that could cause you physical or psychological harm.
- Role or expectations are not well-defined** – you aren't totally clear on what your role is or how it fits into the overarching goals of the team or organization.
- Misaligned job demands or resources** – you don't have the resources (time, money, staff, leadership support, etc.) you need to do the job at-hand.
- Lack of control or flexibility** – you feel that you aren't consulted about nor have control over how your work is organized nor that there is flexibility around how and when the work gets done.
- Work-life/family balance** – you aren't able to meet important personal or family obligations as a result of work demands.
- Job-skill mismatch** – your role doesn't feel like the right fit; you can't bring your particular skills, talents or interests to the work you are doing.
- Low acknowledgment or reward** – it feels like your effort and achievements aren't being sufficiently acknowledged or rewarded.
- Quality of relationships** – your relationships at work don't feel positive or supportive.
- High degree of change** – there has been a lot of difficult change on your team or in your organization.
- Unproductive conditions** – your workspace isn't comfortable, functional or aesthetically pleasing or you aren't having enough uninterrupted time to get your work done.
- Poor physical or mental health** – you don't feel well physically or mentally, or you are having difficulty prioritizing your physical or mental health.
- Any other stressors?**





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Is there a particular work stressor you'd like to address right now?

Our bodies give us signals that we're stressed. Everyone has their own responses, and sometimes we don't even know how we're responding unless we take the time to notice. So, let's take a little time.

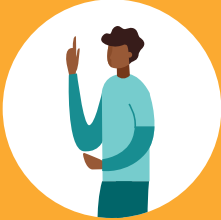
Here are some things we may experience when we're stressed. Use the list below to track your automatic response(s) to current or recent experiences of stress?⁴

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting distracted easily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating or nausea | <input type="checkbox"/> Being bossy or controlling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shallow or rapid breathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Working harder, longer or faster |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of energy or feeling tired | <input type="checkbox"/> Making more mistakes than usual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sleeping well (or waking up worrying) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in appetite (stress eating or not eating enough) | <input type="checkbox"/> Losing your temper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |





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Acceptance

Try to accept how you feel without judging yourself—treat yourself with kindness.

Understand what you have control over in the situation (Tip: Likely, you have control over your own responses).

If a colleague or friend was facing a similar stressful situation, or was feeling the way you do, what would you say to them?

We don't have control over many things that come our way, and there's no sense in stressing over something that is beyond your control.

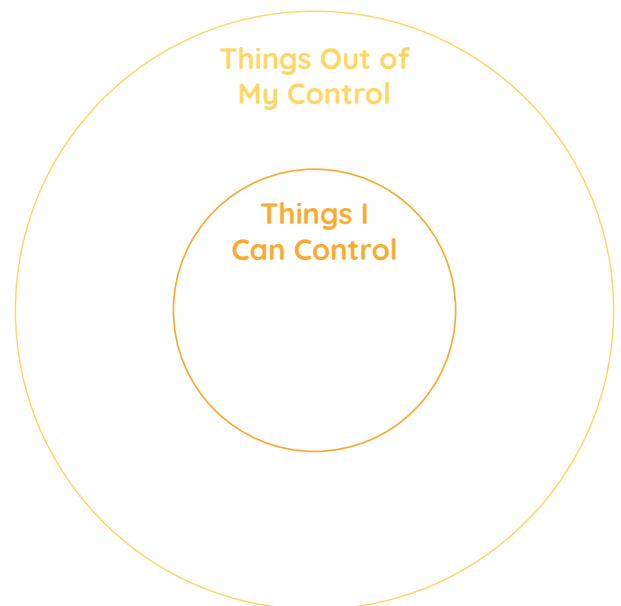
Take a moment to consider the situation at hand—what elements are within your control, and what are not?

As hard as it is, sometimes we simply have to accept things as they are because we can't control them. Ultimately, it can save a lot of time and emotional energy to just let some things go.

Here are some tips that might help you to accept the situation and to cope:

Share your feelings – consult someone in your support network or with a mental health professional. You might find the things that cause you stress have less power over you when you do.

Try journaling or meditation – you may find that these or other stress management techniques will help you let go of the negative feelings (check *Tips to De-stress at Work*).



If you feel like you're getting stuck in an "automatic negative thinking loop" try using the *Train Your Brain* worksheet.





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Adjustment

Change your narrative—view challenges as opportunities.

Play to your strengths.

When we understand what's causing us stress, we can look more objectively at the situation that's creating it and re-frame it in a way that helps us feel more empowered to control what we can.

Remind yourself that you've worked through challenges in the past. List three difficult situations that you have experienced. How did you deal with them?

Which of your top strengths can help you deal with this challenge?

Top 3 Strengths	How can I use this strength to help me deal with this challenge?





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Action

Taking action, no matter how small, can get the ball rolling.
Start with small and achievable actions.

Get into problem-solving, brainstorm mode: What actions can you take? (Tip: Get creative and don't censor yourself; you can always hone your list later.)

Example: Have a frank conversation with my manager about the resources I have to do my job so we can come up with solutions together.

Example: Take my breaks and get outside for a walk once a day.

What three things can you do today, this week, and within a month to reduce your current stress? (Remember: You don't have to solve the problem all at once. Choose something doable that you can check off your list, and that makes you feel good.)

Today	This week	Within a month





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Are there other, longer term things you can do to be prepared if a similar situation happens in the future?

Important: If you find the stress you are experiencing to be overwhelming or that it is affecting your ability to function day-to-day, you may want to consider reaching out to a mental health professional.

Additional Not Myself Today resources for addressing stress:

- Resource Sheet: *Job-Related Stressors*
- Resource Sheet: *Train Your Brain to Master Your Mood*
- Worksheet: *Train Your Brain*
- Activity: *De-stress Dice*
- Activity: *Stress-busting for Teams*

End Notes:

- 1 Plan for Resilience, www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com
- 2 Wellness@uchicago: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/healthy-living/health-information/stress/>
- 3 Canadian Standards Association. (2013). CAN/CSA-Z1003-13: *Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation*.
- 4 Czabala, C., Charzyńska, K., & Mroziak, B. (2011). *Psychosocial interventions in workplace mental health promotion: an overview*. *Health Promotion International*, 26 (suppl_1), i70-i84.

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- Gabriel, P. and Liimatainen, M-R. (2000), *Mental Health in the Workplace: Introduction, Executive Summaries* (Geneva: International Labour Office).
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- Lamb, D., & Cogan, N. (2016). *Coping with work-related stressors and building resilience in mental health workers: A comparative focus group study using interpretative phenomenological analysis*. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 89(3), 474-492.
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