Keep your stress in check

Stress is a normal part of life, and everyone experiences it in different ways and in different phases of life. Stress can be the motivating pressure to hit a work deadline, or it can be the signal that makes you flee from danger. And although some stress is normal, having too much can send your body into overdrive and your physical and mental health can suffer. That's why it's vital to keep it in check.

What happens when you're stressed?
Your body goes into a fight-or-flight response. Your heart beats faster, your breath quickens, your muscles tighten, and your energy is at a high level. These feelings can affect your digestive system, immune system, heart health, and your mental health.

Although you can't always avoid your stressors, how you cope with them can make a big difference for your well-being.

Did you know?

Most Americans report feeling stressed daily. Long-term stress can increase the risk of heart disease, digestive issues, sleep disturbances, weight gain and skin problems.

Six things you can do to manage stress.

1. Make healthy habits a top priority

Focusing on healthy lifestyle behaviors can help manage feelings of stress and anxiousness. Eat regularly (healthy food you enjoy is best), stay hydrated, pass on the booze, exercise, and keep your sleep schedule the same. Try to avoid skipping breakfast or staying up too late.

2. Connect with family and friends

Go for a neighborhood walk, meet up for coffee, or arrange a video chat with someone you trust. It's natural to self-isolate when we aren't feeling our best but withdrawing from family and friends isn't going to help your mental health long-term.

3. Take time to relax and recharge

Practice yoga, listen to calming music, try mindfulness meditation or deep breathing, or just do a quick body scan to identify areas of tension and relax those muscles. Try an app, like Calm or Headspace, for guidance on these techniques.

4. Build a daily routine

A detailed schedule can help you feel less overwhelmed. Create a routine that allows enough time for getting daily tasks done and for self-care or relaxation. Try not to overwork yourself, as this can lead to burnout.

5. Focus on what you can control

When feeling overwhelmed with information or tasks, focus on the present moment and small things you can control. Think about a single, small part of your life that you have control over, that you can engage with easily, and that provides you with a boost to your well-being.

6. Express your feelings, including the negative ones

Write in a journal, cry it out, chat with a trusted friend or find a coach or therapist to talk with. It's normal (and human) to have feelings of anger, anxiety, fear and stress, but try not to dwell on your negative thoughts.

For information on your mental well-being benefits, visit ProvidenceHealthPlan.com/members