

Two Strategies for Successful Stress Management

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How do you define and manage stress? What types of stress do you experience? There are many answers to these types of questions depending on who you ask. For the purpose of this article, we'll use *Psychology Today's* definition of stress: "Stress is a reaction to a stimulus that disturbs your physical or mental equilibrium." In other words, it's an omnipresent part of life. A stressful event can trigger the 'fight-or-flight' response causing hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, to surge through the body" (para 1). Stress is both physiological and psychological. *BusinessDictionary.com* adds that stress adds a "physical or social force of pressure that puts real or perceived demands on the body, emotions, mind, or spirit, and which (when it exceeds the stress-handling capacity of the individual) can lead to a breakdown" (para 1). Recognizing and managing stress are important to your well-being. They help you to find your inner balance. "In adulthood, inner balance refers to a calm state of energy, alertness, and focus. Calmness is more than just feeling relaxed; being alert is an equally important aspect of finding the balance needed to withstand stress. If you don't feel calm, alert, and focused in your daily life, then too much stress may be a problem for you" (Help Guide, n.d., para 3). Diane Hamilton (2016), *Forbes School of Business MBA Program Chair and Assistant Professor*, states about stress, "I believe there is good stress, also known as eustress, and bad stress, also known as distress. I thrive on eustress because it motivates me and gives me an extra edge. Life would be boring without any stress!" Eustress is positive and presents an opportunity for personal growth and satisfaction. You experience it when you exercise, learn a new skill, assume a new role, or face a challenge.

Distress is negative and can have debilitating effects. You experience distress when you are verbally attacked, lose a loved one or someone close to you, or confront a subordinate about inferior workplace performance. How can you better manage stress? Here are six suggestions from the *Institute of Certified Professional Managers* (Certified Manager Certification, 2007).

1. **Identify your stressors and stress level.**
2. **Implement time management and organizational skills.**
3. **Share your thoughts and feelings with yourself and others.**
4. **Keep a journal to reflect on what is happening in your life.**
5. **Talk to a trusted friend, relative, co-worker or professional “helper”.**
6. **Use visualization and mental imagery to envision positive outcomes.**

Another approach is George Valliant’s theory for managing stress (as cited in Bee and Bjorklund, 2004). Valliant's view suggests that how people handle and manage life’s stressors determines their success. Essentially, the better you are at managing and handling stress, the better the outcome. Here are Valliant’s top five suggestions for managing stress.

1. **Anticipate change.**
2. **Affiliate with people you trust and can talk to about stress and how to manage it.**
3. **Assert yourself by implementing advice you get on how to manage stress.**
4. **Use sublimation to transform negative feelings into positive ones.**
5. **Use friendly, positive, and appropriate humor to defuse stress and re-energize yourself.**

Humor used in a team setting can make team members healthier, more productive, and more creative (Lumsden, 2004). The influence of humor in reducing stress is a medical certainty. A recent study by the Mayo Clinic (April 21, 2016) found that laughter has great short- and long-term effects. It stimulates many organs and relieves stress responses by aiding muscle relaxation. Laughter is also good for improving the immune system, easing pain, increasing personal satisfaction, and improving one’s mood. Managing stress is not easy, but having two strategies to consider can give you options on how to best manage stress. This overview of stress, eustress, distress, and stress management strategies will help you to maintain productivity and balance, amidst a continuously changing world. Having a knowledge of stress and an understanding of stress management strategies is a first step toward better managing your stress.

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