We can all take action to manage stress in our lives by applying a simple, six-step strategy. This strategy can help us prevent stress by eliminating its source, reducing its impact when eliminating it is not possible, and increasing our resilience against its negative effects on us.
Six-Step Strategy to Managing Stress

CONTENTS

#1: Avoid unnecessary stress
#2: Alter the situation
#3: Adapt to the stressor
#4: Accept the things you can’t change
#5: Practice self-care
#6: Know when and where to seek help
Learn how to say “no”. We all have limits, and we need to know, and respect them, as taking on more than we can handle is a recipe for stress. When we are already stretched thin, whether in our personal or professional life, saying “no” can be difficult, but in the long run it is essential.

Avoid people who stress you out. If someone consistently causes stress in our life and we can’t turn the relationship around, we must find ways to limit the time we spend with that person, or end the relationship entirely if possible.

Not all stress can be avoided, and it’s not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. But we may be surprised how many stressors we actually can eliminate.

Take control of your environment. We can make small adjustments to make our environment less stressful. If the news makes us anxious, we can turn the TV off. If driving in congested traffic makes us tense, we may be able to choose different times to leave or less busy routes. If we dislike shopping, we can shop online.

Avoid sensitive topics. If we repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, we should just cross them off our conversation list, or when the topic is brought up by someone else, just excuse ourselves and resist the temptation to voice our views.

Prioritize your to-do list. We must constantly analyze our schedules, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If we've got too much on our plate, we must distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts”, and drop less urgent and non-essential tasks to the bottom of the list, or eliminate them entirely.

#1: Avoid Unnecessary Stress
#2: Alter the Situation

Express your feelings. When something is bothering us and we neither discuss nor voice our feelings about it, it builds resentment and over time increases the stress. We must find open, constructive, and respectful ways to communicate our concerns.

Be more assertive. We should not give into pressure and do things that we will only regret later. When certain things or people cause us stress, especially repeatedly, we should take steps to prevent it. If we spend beyond our means when shopping with a certain friend, we should do something else together. If we eat more than we should with certain friends, we can go for a coffee instead.

Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. We need to work smarter, not harder, by planning ahead, and prioritizing our work, allocating appropriate time to complete jobs, and by concentrating on tasks that will make a real difference. If falling behind, we can ask for support, and also learn to accept that our in-tray will rarely be empty at the end of the day.

Set limits. When under great time pressure we need to limit the time we spend on things which will not help us complete the task at hand.

Compromise. With conflicting ideas and goals, it is not always possible to have things our way, which can be stressful. If both parties are willing to bend a little, there is a good chance for finding a happy middle ground. When asking someone to change their behavior, we too must be willing to do the same.

When we cannot eliminate a stressor or avoid a stressful situation, we need to alter it. We need to effect change in the situation so the stressor will not come back.
Six-Step Strategy to Managing Stress

#3: Adapt to the Stressor

Adjust your standards.
Demanding perfection in everything at all times is a major source of stress. We need to set reasonable standards for ourselves and for others as well, and learn to be okay with “good enough”. We should ask ourselves - do we really need to vacuum three times a week and have a homemade meal every night?

Be grateful.
When under great stress, we should stop and reflect on the things we are grateful for, including our own positive qualities. Counting our blessings can help us keep things in more positive perspective.

Train your brain for happiness.
When happy we respond to the negatives in our life differently, as positive emotions help us to think more creatively. We can train our brain to think in a happier, more optimistic way.

Reframe problems.
We can try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, or long line in a store, we can look at them as opportunities to pause, catch up on the news, talk to the person standing next to us. Also, we can take bad news about our child's behavior as an opportunity to revisit our priorities, and improve our family life.

Look at the big picture.
When struggling with stress it is easy to lose sight of things that really matter. We need to ask ourselves how important this will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month, a year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If no, we should focus our time and energy on other things.

Help other people.
Helping those who are in situations worse than ours can increase our own happiness far more than doing things for ourselves. It can also help put our problems into perspective.

When we cannot eliminate or change a stressful situation, we can manage it by changing ourselves.

Changing our own expectations and attitude can help us regain and take control of a stressful situation.
Some sources of stress are simply unavoidable, so we have to increase our ability to cope with them.

Accepting things we cannot change can be difficult and may take some time, but his is one good way to cope with such stress.

#4: Accept the things you can’t change

---

Don’t try to control the uncontrollable.

Many things we stress about are beyond our control. These can be small things like bad weather, the way people behave, or serious things, such as the death of a loved one. When faced with situations we cannot really change, rather than stressing about them, we can choose to reflect on the way we react and not let stress overtake us. Learning simple techniques such as slow breathing and muscle relaxation can help us achieve this.

Focus on things you can control.

Lack of, or losing control over situations important to us can be extremely stressful. Finding things we do have control over can empower us for action and find solutions. If our company is going under, we cannot change it, but doing nothing about how this affects us will only make things worse. Focusing on things under our control, such as looking for a new job can help reduce stress.

---

Look for the upside.

When facing challenges, we can try to look at them as opportunities. If we have to stay at home with a sick child, we can use the time to do some housework we would not have time for otherwise.

Learn to forgive.

Anger and resentment often accompany stressful situations and experiences. Forgiving can free us from these negative emotions and help us move on. We can “train” ourselves to accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and people, including us, make mistakes. If our own poor actions led to a stressful situation, we should accept that we made a mistake, reflect, learn, and move on.

Let off some steam.

Stress can become too much and we may feel we cannot really cope on our own. Letting off some steam can reduce stress, even if there’s nothing we can do to alter the stressful situation. We can call a trusted friend, or go for coffee to talk about what we are going through.
#5: Practice self-care

Self-care is one of the most important tools we have to reduce stress in our lives.

While we are unique individuals, and need to find what self-care strategies work for us, there are things that we all can do.

We all can be active, positive, connected, mindful, curious and purposeful. All these actions will make us more resilient.

When resilient, we believe more confidently that “we can” manage the stress in our life.

**Be active.**
When we are active and keep our body strong and fit we feel happier and heathier, and deal with stress more effectively. We need to find a physical activity that we enjoy so we will stick with it. The gym is an option, but we can also bike, walk, take the stairs, or dance more often. Powering through the housework or gardening with extra vigor will do us good as well. To be active we will also need to keep our body healthy by eating a balanced and nutritious diet and by getting enough sleep.

**Be positive.**
With a positive outlook on life we tend to feel stronger and happier. It can help improve our health, and our ability to manage stress more confidently. We can teach ourselves to focus more on the good both in ourselves and in the world around us. We can practice positive self-talk to remind ourselves that we are strong, and also try to stop gloomy thoughts before they become a negative mental avalanche.

**Be connected.**
We all need to feel understood, recognized, and affirmed by others, and to give and receive affection. We need to feel that we belong. Without it, we often feel lost, alone, and unappreciated. We need to make a conscious effort to build good relationships with our family and friends, and to find groups we can “fit in”, and find help when needed.

**Be mindful.**
When mindful, we are not regretting the past or worrying about the future. We are in the here and now, appreciating the moment. We can practice being mindful anywhere, anytime by focusing all our attention on something in the world around, or on what we are doing, thinking or feeling, such as the food we are eating. Being mindful helps make every day count.

**Be curious.**
Staying curious about the world and learning new things keeps the excitement in our life and can help us feel better about ourselves. We need to find something that interests us, maybe learning a new language or getting practical with a DIY project. When we master something new, our self-esteem improves, and we deal with stressful situations more effectively.

**Be purposeful.**
To have a purpose means serving something other than ourselves. We should try to find purpose in our life by finding things that matter to us, maybe family, work, or our community. A purpose, both big and small can energize us, to deal with difficulties more confidently.
#6: Know when and where to seek help

When we cannot eliminate stressor or avoid a stressful situation, we need to alter it. We need to change something in the situation so the will not come backs.

Take these actions:

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up
- Be willing to compromise
- Be more assertive
- Manage your time better

When to seek help

When signs and symptoms of stress last for an extended period of time, worsen, or interfere with your ability to function.

When under great stress and existing medical or physical illness worsens, and signs and symptoms of a new health and mental health problems appear.

Where to find help

**Family friends and support groups.**
You may seek help and support for your friends, family, community groups, and other support groups.

**NYC Well.**
Seek free and confidential professional mental health support for you or someone you care about by contacting NYCWell. Counselors can connect you to ongoing support.

- Talk: 1888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355)
- Text: WELL to 65173
- Chat: nyc.gov/nycwell

Texting and live chat services are available in English, Spanish and Traditional Chinese.
Free over-the-phone interpretation services are available in more than 200 languages.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP).**
Seek help for work-related stress and other issues by contacting EAP, a free and confidential support to all NYC non-uniformed employees and their dependents.

- Phone: 212-306-7660
- Email: eap@olr.nyc.gov
When we cannot eliminate stressor or avoid a stressful situation, we need to alter it. We need to change something in the situation so the will not come backs.

Take these actions:

 Express your feelings instead of bottling them up
 Be willing to compromise
 Be more assertive
 Manage your time better

Bibliography

- Connect for mental wellbeing; https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/connect-for-mental-wellbeing/
- United Nations Stress Management Booklet HTTPS://DRC.NGO/MEDIA/2113524/UN-STRESS-MANAGEMENT-BOOKLET.PDF
- National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), National Institute of Health, Stress https://nccih.nih.gov/health/stress
- National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), National Institute of Health 5 Things To Know About Relaxation Techniques for Stress https://nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/stress
- How to manage stress https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/signs-of-stress/#.WKLRoXkSGUk
- Stress Management, Relaxation techniques: Try these steps to reduce Mayo Clinic. stress http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/relaxation-technique/art-20045368
- How good habits drive happiness- The science and practice of goods life, Monika Erős-Sarnyai ,MD. MA, DOHMH