

# HOW DO I COPE WITH THE STRESSES AND STRAINS OF DAY TO DAY LIVING?

Stress goes hand-in-hand with being human. Walking adds stress to muscles keeping the body erect and coordinating movement. Eating food also places stress onto the digestive tract in turn leading to a release of digestive enzymes and guidance of food through the digestive tract<sup>1</sup>. More commonly however, stress is referred to as situations or circumstances that challenge the human coping mechanism negatively. This includes scenarios where you might feel tested or strained mentally, beyond your usual level of comfort or coping ability. E.g. if you are writing a very important test that you did not study for.

**Different things may trigger feelings of stress and anxiety and can be broken down into two main categories:**




Threats to your physical well-being – such as nearly escaping from an impending car accident or difficult financial situations leading to a lack of food or shelter.



Threats to your mental well-being – such as failure to reach personal goals, failure to perform well at your school or in school activities, fear of not being accepted by your classmates and friends and peer pressure to conform.

When you experience such threats to your emotional or physical wellbeing you might experience a 'fight-or-flight' reaction causing the following reactions in your body<sup>1</sup>:

- A fast or pounding heartbeat
- Breathing at a faster rate
- Extreme thirst or shivers related to increased blood glucose levels
- A flushed appearance or redness in the face caused by dilated blood
- Dilated pupils of the eye
- Slowing down of food moving throughout the gastro-intestinal tract so that energy is kept to power your vital organs
- Sweaty palms
- Dry mouth
- Release of stress hormones within the bloodstream
- Feelings of fear and / or anxiety
- Feeling of impending doom
- Panic attacks



There are many causes of stress, generally affecting people differently depending on you: coping strategies; personality traits (some people might stress more easily about things that wouldn't bother others); cultural-; environmental-; physical-; and cognitive factors<sup>1</sup>.

**The key to successfully navigating through life's challenges lie in self-awareness and adaption of healthy coping strategies.**



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Almost all people perceive reactions to stress as uncomfortable and immediately try to relieve these feelings. Healthy coping strategies could include:



Turning to a friend or family member for support or contacting a support group. You could also speak to your school's guidance counsellor or social worker.



Relying on your self-discipline such as using your perseverance to maintain a positive attitude throughout the challenging time.



Expressing your feelings through laughing at yourself when you make mistakes or writing down your feelings in a journal.



Taking time out to nurture your body such as taking a warm bath/shower or listening to music.



Talking it out and considering new ideas or perspectives about how you can better cope with the problem you are faced with.



Thinking it through and considering what possibilities lie hidden in this challenge.



Working it off by going for a walk, run, or dancing to use the increased energy in a more productive way.



Engaging in self-healing mind/body practices such as yoga, meditation or going to a park/outside area.



Engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer.



Seek professional help if you feel that you need assistance in developing healthy coping mechanisms.

The key to successfully navigating through life's challenges lie in self-awareness and adaption of healthy coping strategies. When you are able to quickly identify the symptoms of stress and anxiety you will be able to put helpful coping mechanisms into place and to learn how to best deal with stressful situations.

This infographic does not cover every aspect of mental health. Consult a doctor or your nearest emergency unit if you are concerned about your own or a loved one's mental health. The information is shared on condition that readers will make their own determination, including seeking advice from a qualified healthcare professional. E&OE.  
Reference: 2012. Abnormal psychology: A South African perspective. Cape Town: Oxford University Press. Edited by Burke 560Pp.

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