



HOW TO MANAGE STRESS AND LIVE DRUG FREE

If there was a magic wand that, with a swoosh left and a swish right, would remove the stress that invades our lives, everyone would want one—because everyone needs one.

More than an assumption, the insurmountable obligations each of us have in our day-to-day lives (self-imposed or brought on by others) is testament enough to the how, when and where stress pervades our existence. The millions dependent on benzodiazepines, opioids, alcohol or marijuana show that people often believe that the only path to effectively manage stress comes from the outside-in. Nothing could be more farther from the truth.

PROBLEMS STAY, UNTIL YOU FACE THEM

We have become a society of hypocrisy. On one hand, we glorify free speech on social media. Then conversely, we fear the backlash that comes from self-expression.

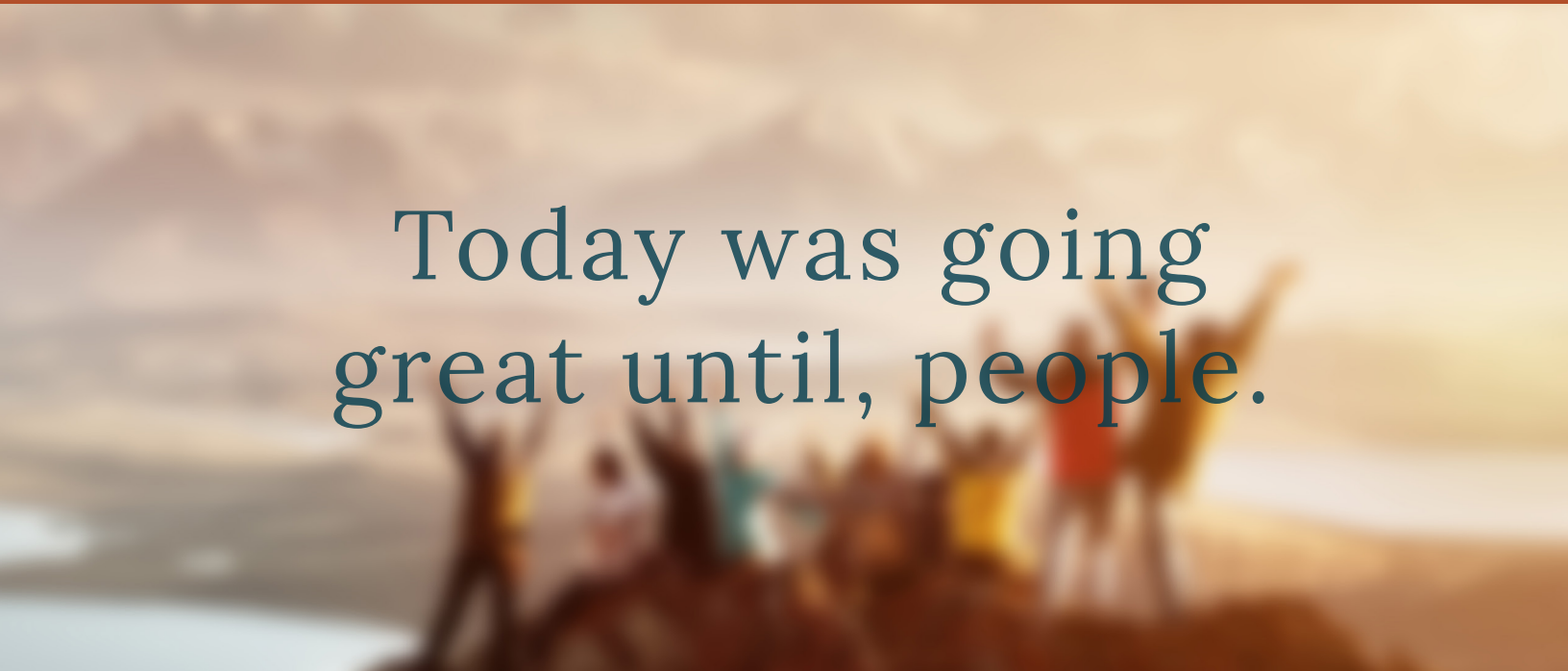


To remain “safe”, many avoid confrontation by staying clear of human interaction. Though this is virtually impossible, those who find difficulty with communication or public-facing socialization often find solace in medications to help curb anxiety. But there are repercussions.

Anti-anxiety medications may help reduce the symptoms of fear and anxiety.

However, they only mask the existence of the mental health condition. Once the body and the brain get used to the drug, the desired effects will reduce over time, requiring an increase in dosage strength or frequency. This is how chemical dependency happens. This is why identifying what’s behind the anxiety is crucial to getting in front of it.

PINPOINTING ROOT CAUSES OF STRESS



Today was going great until, people.

There are many reasons why stress arises in our lives. It could be related to a specific and isolated circumstance, such as public speaking, that wreaks havoc on self-confidence and emotional stability. For others, stress and the depression and anxiety it brings can be sourced back to dealing with a certain person, visiting a place, or reliving an unfortunate situation, common with instances of PTSD.

Whether the stress is anticipated, for example, from having to attend a funeral, or comes as a complete surprise due to an injury, accident, or emotional abuse, the manifestations of stress to the body and the brain are detrimental to overall wellbeing.

For a person who has developed a drug or alcohol addiction, even after treatment and throughout recovery, stress management will prove more pressing in daily life and be paramount to success in sobriety.

“Embrace the glorious mess that you are.”

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A STRESSFUL ENCOUNTER

Experiencing moments of anxiety or a full blown panic attack are hard to explain, much less get through. Overwhelming feelings of pending doom, loss of breath, erratic and pounding heartbeat, coupled with bone-chilling fear and never-ending sweat are typical sensations of a stress-induced meltdown. And the process comes by us honestly.

In moments of stress, the body and the mind work collectively to signal the production of three different hormones:

- Adrenaline
- Norepinephrine
- Cortisol

Once these hormones are released, humans go into the “fight or flight” response, our coping mechanism that engages heightened abilities to better respond to danger. But most often, when we overreact to stress that isn't life-threatening, it can lead to psychological and physical problems.

Past and current life traumas, drugs, alcohol and other toxic exposures set off our “fight or flight” response. But through overuse, the system meant to help has been compromised and does not work effectively any more, causing us harm.

Moreover, chemical dependency adversely impacts the brain's natural ability to produce dopamine and serotonin, our feel-good hormones. This is why drugs, medications and alcohol increase the propensity for stress and anxiety, even in moments that wouldn't normally cause feelings of fear, anger and other negative reactions.

THE CYCLE OF FEAR AND AVOIDANCE



HOW STRESS ESCALATES



Consider a single problem, worry or concern you have at this time. When it arises, it's easy to attach specific meaning or feeling to the problem, not only validating it but giving it arms and legs to move into other aspects of our psyche. This is how a small issue can suddenly become enormous in a matter of seconds.

You may be familiar with the term “drama queen” or someone who seems to enjoy drama. These types of people may not find comfort in the drama they seem to gravitate to or create, but may be more about how they perceive each issue in their lives. By combining one issue with another, and so on, the drama mounts and suddenly, life is a complete hot mess. Instead, identify each singular issue and deal with it on an individual basis, rather than compound them.

JUST BREATHE THROUGH IT, LITERALLY

As with other parts of the recovery process, resetting emotions and bodily responses to stress will take time to find, achieve and sustain balance.

Quick Tips for Minimizing the Impact of Stress

Acquiring a talent for defaulting to quick diversions works well for alleviating stress. When you find yourself hyper-focusing on something or someone who impacts your life negatively, switch up your focus on the positive.

Things to Remember When Stressed

- All people have stress
- Take on a single task (in your mind)
- Ask others for assistance
- Plan out your day and expect surprises
- Know that you have the ability to say “no”
- Compartmentalize emotions and obligations
- Add mindfulness practices to daily routine
 - To start your day
 - Just before sleep
 - Before facing a stressful situation

Remember how a certain song can make you feel, and seemingly turn your head around by the time you sing the first chorus? As wild as this may sound... sing! Or play your favorite tune, the one that can take you from a place of despair and prop you up in positivity.

If you have more time to work on moving past feelings of anxiety, put your mind on neutral and dive into self-expression through art. Create an instantaneous doodle or devote some time on canvass using charcoal chalk, water color or oil paints. More than a way to ease stress, you could develop a lifelong hobby and works of art.

However, not all stress reduction tactics can be utilized on the job, while in a car, or sitting in the presence of acquaintances or strangers. This is more evident when a panic attack comes on.

Stress Reduction Options

1. Take a walk.
2. Chant a favorite prayer, motivational phrase, or meditational saying.
3. Practice self-love, often.
4. Call/text someone in your personal support network (friends, family, coworker).
5. Remember: This is temporary; it too shall pass.

BREATHE IN STRESS, BREATHE OUT RELIEF

During the initial onset of anxiety, one of the first things you'll notice is a change in breathing. To help stop anxiety, try either of the following methods:



The 4-7-8

1. Exhale slowly, through your mouth.
2. As you exhale, make a “whoosh” sound.
3. Then close your mouth.
4. Inhale through the nose quietly, while counting 1, 2, 3, 4 silently.
5. At the end of the inhale, hold your breath for a count of 7.
6. Exhale through the mouth (like steps 1 and 2), “whoosh” to a count of 8.
7. Repeat the process until you feel the anxiousness leave you.

Belly Breathing

1. This can be done in a seated position, or while lying down flat.
2. Put one hand on your belly.
3. Put your other hand on your chest and let your belly push your hand out.
4. Breathe through lips pursed together.
5. Focus on the hand atop your belly as it goes in, pushing all the air out.
6. Repeat at least 3 times and up to 10.

OVERVIEW OF STRESS MANAGEMENT USING SHORT- AND LONG-TERM APPROACHES

Each of us has our own set of ideals about what a stress-free life looks like. Though we may never fully achieve this type of nirvana, learning how to better manage stress takes us that much closer.

Pay attention to what triggers moments of fear and find ways to work around them. Note the people, places and situations that escalate anxiety and, whenever possible, be more discriminating about your time spent there.

Add mindfulness practices, exercise, feel-good hobbies, and positive relationships to your waking hours. For more support, refer to holistic and mental health practitioners at Alternative To Meds Center for long-term solutions.

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 For an Anti-Anxiety Consultation, Call 1-888-907-7075

