

## Stress Management

Stress is a part of all our lives. As young adults, stressors may be due to job situations, financial issues, family-work juggling, and the like. As we age, our stressors change a bit – perhaps they result from failing health, reduced finances, too much unstructured time, challenges of retaining our independence or insomnia and other sleep problems. On top of this, it is harder for our bodies to manage stress as we age. Thus, as we age, it's important to practice stress-reducing behaviors, and to add activities into our daily routines that will help our bodies manage stress in strong, healthy ways. Use this tip sheet to work toward incorporating new stress-relieving habits into your daily life. Work them in slowly, or try a few at one time, and feel the amazing, healthy results!

**Stay Connected!** Social connections improve our quality of life! Staying connected with people helps us feel part of something bigger than ourselves. When we have social connections, we are less likely to become sick, more likely to live longer, have lower blood pressure, and less risk of depression.<sup>1</sup> Thus, try to maintain and/or create social connections with friends and family, or join a social club (card club, wine club, walking club, etc.), a support group (such as a bereavement group), or a senior center (with lots of activities such as card and board games, arts and crafts, exercise, yoga or tai chi classes, trips, dances, lectures, and more). Finally, some research suggests that having a pet can be a huge boost to our emotional and physical health. Pets keep us active as we walk/care for them. They make us laugh and be happy, they cuddle with us ... but of course, we have to balance all of these positive stress-reducing results with the responsibilities of pet ownership.



**Exercise and keep active.** Daily exercise, while to some may seem daunting, improves health, sleep, lifts our moods, and is a huge factor in keeping stress under control. Aim for *30 minutes of weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening activity daily*, even low-impact exercise activities such as walking, to help keep stress levels down.

**Stretch and breath every day!** Relaxing, with intention, by stretching and doing breathing exercises, helps reduce stress and its symptoms by reducing blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, oxygen consumption, and stress hormones.<sup>2</sup> Aim for 15 minutes of flexibility, balance, and stress relief activity each day, such as yoga or tai chi.

Try this breathing exercise:

- Inhale slowly, mentally counting 1–2–3–4, and then exhale slowly, silently counting 4–3–2–1.
- Do this 3-4 times, a couple of times a day, to help reduce stress and increase oxygenation of your body.

**Sleep.** Most of us likely assume that as we age, we need less sleep – but, nothing can be farther from the truth! On the contrary, our sleep should remain constant throughout adulthood at **7-9 hours a night!** Sleeping enough helps us *feel less stressed*, so try some of these sleep-inducing tips:

- Try to go to bed at the same time every night.
- Try not to nap during the day, it may keep you up at night. If you are feeling tired, go for a walk, do some house cleaning, or some other movement-based activity to “wake you up” instead of napping.
- Avoid caffeine in the second half of the day. Even if consumed a few hours before bedtime, it can keep you awake.
- Exercise early in the day.
- To fall asleep faster, bring a book to bed rather than your laptop computer or the TV remote.

**Make time for activities you enjoy!** Making time each day for activities you enjoy will help you manage your stress, while keeping your mind sharp, body strong, and spirits high! Do you like playing games with family and friends? Do you like being outdoors, birdwatching, walking in your favorite park? Do you have a favorite hobby? Whatever it is, find something *fun* to do every day to keep you happy and your stress levels down!



**Eat healthily, go for colorful, nutrient-rich foods that boost energy!** As we age, the number of calories we need each day decreases, so we need to be mindful of how to maintain a healthy weight. We all know eating lots of colorful vegetables and fruits, especially in raw form, is the best way to stay healthy and keep calorie intake low. But often, we don't think much about the **power** of eating vegetables and fruits with respect to managing stress! Eating processed foods (high in sugars, starches, and/or fats) can play havoc on our moods and associated stress levels. On the other hand, research has shown that eating nutritious vegetables and fruits, such as dark leafy greens like spinach (rich in folate) and berries (blue, black, and raspberries are packed with antioxidants), helps our bodies produce mood-regulating neurotransmitters, including serotonin and dopamine that help keep stress at bay.

*"On days when people ate more fruits and vegetables, they reported feeling calmer, happier, and more energetic than they normally did." Dr. Tamlin Conner<sup>3</sup>*

*Extra! As a treat, a bit of dark, pure, unadulterated chocolate has been shown to help people feel calmer and reduce stress!<sup>4</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.brookdale.com/en/brookdale-life/blogs/2017/05/seniors-and-loneliness-tips-for-staying-connected.html>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/aging/how-stress-affects-seniors-and-how-to-manage-it>

<sup>3</sup> University of Otago January 24, 2013 as cited at: <https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2015/04/27/10-stress-relieving-superfoods.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Journal of Psychopharmacology May 2013 as cited at: <https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2015/04/27/10-stress-relieving-superfoods.aspx>