

STRATEGIES TO MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Just as people experience stress differently, the things that can work to relieve stress vary too. A number of suggestions for ways of coping with stress are listed below. You might want to try one or many; it's up to you. It can also be helpful to try something that you haven't tried before. You may surprise yourself! Use the tips as a springboard for your own ideas. Try to be flexible and open to suggestions.

- Eat healthily and regularly (even if only a little). Get physical if you can (go for a walk, a swim, dance to a favourite song, play a round of golf or walk or use a buggy while friends play). Avoid excessive use of alcohol or other drugs (including tobacco and caffeine).
- Become more aware of what triggers stress for you. Break problems down into more manageable pieces. Organise yourself where you can (plan how you will get to treatment or who is taking the children to sports practice) and prioritise tasks.
- Try to breathe slowly and gently. Do some relaxation exercises such as yoga, Pilates or tai chi.
- Take a little time for yourself: if you have a cat or dog, sit down and stroke or pat them. Give yourself time. Watch a favourite television program or DVD, or read a magazine or book (or listen to an audio book). Play or listen to some music that you enjoy or resume a craft or some other activity you used to enjoy. Go for a massage, facial or give yourself a hand massage or have a bath. Make some time to be in nature – go for a bushwalk, sit by the sea and smell the air, buy some flowers, go into your garden or look at a view.
- Find ways to connect with others, consider a support or interest group (e.g. online). Ask a friend to go to the movies, club, bingo, coffee shop etc. with you. Talk to others about what is bothering you (this could be a friend, family member, trusted colleague, health professional) and learn to accept help from others (to cook a meal, pay a bill, be a listening ear).
- Use helpful 'self-talk' – ask yourself if you need to be so black and white, critical of yourself or others, sceptical and so on. Is it helping you to think this way? Recognize that it is unrealistic to please everyone – learn to say 'no' or 'later'.
- If your thoughts seem stuck on an issue, attempt to distract yourself and to shift your focus for a little while (e.g. go to another room, telephone a friend). Try not to let your thoughts become catastrophic, even when life feels frightening.
- Take responsibility for the things you can change and recognize what you cannot. Write down worries and the things that bother you – you may see a new direction to take.
- Try not to expect yourself or others to be perfect; people simply are not.

Extracted from: Gilchrist, Jemma, 'Stress and Anxiety' in Hodgkinson, Dr Katharine; Gilchrist, Dr Jemma (eds), *Psychosocial Care of Cancer Patients: A Health Professional's Guide to What to Say and Do*, Ausmed Publications (2008, Melbourne), 125.

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