Tips for Stress Management

Stress is not inherent in any event; it lies in how we perceive that event. For example, if the resources we bring to an event are equal to or greater than the demands of the event, we will not perceive the event to be stressful. On the other hand, if our resources are less than the demands, we do experience stress.

The key to effective stress management is to balance resources with demands. You can do this in 2 ways: 1. increase resources, or 2. decrease demands. The following tips are intended to help you find some balance and manage stress effectively.

1. **Eliminate pseudo stress “solutions”** that impair your health such as tranquilizers, sleeping pills, alcohol, and cigarettes.

2. **Recognize short-term solutions** such as shouting, crying, or taking a hot bath to be what they are – short-term (use them as needed but not on a regular basis).

3. **Prioritize your tasks** into “essential”, “important”, and “trivial.” Follow that order for completing tasks. Consider dropping all the “trivials”. Take one thing at a time.

4. Try to be **satisfied with a less than perfect performance** from yourself.

5. **Change your internal language**. Instead of saying, “I have to…,” say I choose to …” Instead of getting down on yourself, support yourself the way you would support a close friend.

6. **Learn to organize your time.** There are many classes, services and books available on time management.

7. **Take care of your body.** Eat well, sleep enough, exercise regularly, and ... breathe.

8. **Learn to accept what you cannot change.** If the problem is beyond your control now, try to let go of it until you can change it.

9. **Recognize stress signals.** When you feel stress setting in, observe your body and learn where it hits (what happens first? … tension in your neck or back, headache, frustrated more easily, less motivated?). The earlier you can recognize stress signals, the easier it is to change your behavior and stop the progression of the stress.
10. **Choose wisely.** There are many ways to manage frustration & anger. Hiding your anger is more stressful than expressing it – know the trade-offs each option has when expressing anger. Consider the kind of situations it is worth hiding anger and situations when it would be better to express it.

11. **Work off stress.** If you are angry or upset, try to blow off steam physically by running, biking, etc. Physical activity gives you a “fight” outlet for mental stress.

12. **Learn relaxation techniques** and practice them regularly. Bio-feedback, diaphragmatic breathing, and meditation are two useful routes.

13. **Keep a journal.** Observe when you are stressed, the causes, your responses, and the outcome. Make some observations about which techniques are most helpful.

14. **Share your concern with someone** – a friend, a family member, or a counselor. Groups can be an effective option.

15. **Do something for others.** Sometimes when you are too distressed, you tend to focus on yourself. When you find this happening, consider doing something for someone else to get your mind off yourself.

16. **Develop a hobby or interest** that you really enjoy and one which is totally separate from your academic or professional work. Allow yourself to pursue it.

17. **Develop preventative, long-term strategies** for dealing with stress (ie., nutrition, relaxation, regular exercise) and immediate, responsive techniques (ie., assertiveness training) to deal with events and episodes that come up.

18. **Don’t wait** for the time “When you can relax” – That ‘time’ may never come. Learn to relax now (before the day comes) – then it will already be here.