



Manage Your Health: One Step at a Time

Healthy Coping

Healthy coping, a key element in building resilience, is essential for managing life. Everyone needs to strike a balance between stressors, or negative feelings, and positive emotions. Coping is the process of deliberately taking action to create and maintain that balance.

Self-examination

To examine how well you cope and care for yourself, think about how you would answer the following questions. You may want to go back and see how your answers change over time.

- What do you do for fun and relaxation? How often?
- What helps you to relax?
- When was your last real vacation?
- Who makes you feel most comfortable?
- When was the last time you did something physical?
- What makes you laugh?
- How do you know when you aren't taking care of yourself?
- What creates stress in your life?
- How do you know when you are stressed?
- What helps you cope with stress?
- Do your ways of coping with stress cause you any problems?

Life is not what it's supposed to be. It's what it is. The way you cope with it is what makes the difference.

Virginia Satir

Answering these questions can help you recognize how well you cope with life and take care of yourself. Identifying strengths and assets you use to cope, as well as the areas you would like to develop, will help enhance your resilience.

Coping Methods

Coping and caring for yourself means nurturing yourself the way you nurture others. It means paying attention to your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs so you can be healthy, well-rounded, and self-aware.

It also means avoiding destructive, shortcut methods of relieving stress, such as drug or alcohol use or hostile behavior toward others.

Coping methods with proven results include: I gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which I must stop and look fear in the face.... I say to myself, I've lived through this and can take the next thing that comes along... We must do the things that we think we cannot do.

Eleanor Roosevelt

- **Physical calming**, or decreasing the physical signs of stress by taking good care of yourself. Physical calming methods include getting enough sleep, being physically active every day, and eating regularly.
- **Emotional calming**, or finding ways to express and deal with your emotions. You can release your emotions by talking with friends, writing in a journal, receiving counseling, or crying.
- **Critical thinking and creativity**. You can use your analytical and creative powers to identify how you can change the stressful situation (e.g., ending an energy-draining relationship or finding a new job) - and then follow through on the course of action you think is best.

Activities to Improve Coping

- Pay attention to how you feel, physically and emotionally.
- Eat regularly and well, but don't worry about occasional junk food or dessert.
- Work hard-but take vacations, even if they are just long weekends. Take mini-vacations: go to a movie, attend a religious service, walk in a park, or just get away from the demands of your life for a while.
- Spend time with people you care about and who care about you.
- Allow yourself to feel-and express-your emotions appropriately.
- Do something physical every day, but don't feel the need to join a gym or run a marathon.
- Get fresh air-even if it's just parking farther from the grocery store and walking.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Stand up for yourself and your needs in a respectful but firm manner.
- Find a creative outlet for your emotions, such as writing, art, humor, gardening, or other activities that spark your imagination and refresh you.
- Reduce your intake of caffeine and nicotine, which are stimulants that can increase feelings of stress.
- Think about things you CAN change instead of focusing on things you can't.
- Identify the situations in your life that cause you stress, and develop alternative solutions or options for dealing with them.
- Recognize when the stressful event is not in your control, and think about how you can respond to it more effectively.

Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.
Helen Keller

Source: VA Resilience Project. http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbID=DB_HealthyCoping684