

STRESS LESS QUEST

Week 1: Recognizing Stress

For many people, stress is so common that it has become a way of life. The good news is that there's something you can do to protect yourself. When you learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress, you can take steps to reduce its harmful effects.

First, know that everyone experiences some amount of stress. It may be great, or it may be small; it may come from good experiences or from events that make you feel threatened. No matter the intensity or source, stress usually disrupts balance in your life, and that is when it becomes uncomfortable.

You may have heard of the "fight-or-flight" reaction. This happens when your body's defenses kick into a rapid, automatic process in response to a threat. This is your body's way of protecting you. When this process works properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert.

Excess and out-of-control stress can become harmful to your health. It can affect your mood, productivity, relationships, and quality of life.

This six-week program will help you take control of the stress in your life.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress Overload

Uncontrolled stress can cause or contribute to many different types of physical and psychological disorders. Check out the list of signs and symptoms of stress, and identify which ones you experience when you're stressed.



Cognitive Symptoms

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor judgment
- Negative thinking
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying



Physical Symptoms

- Aches and pains
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Nausea, dizziness
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds



Emotional Symptoms

- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Depression or general unhappiness



Behavioral Symptoms

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (nail biting, pacing, etc.)

Keep in mind that the signs and symptoms of stress can also be caused by other psychological and medical problems. Your doctor can help you determine whether or not your symptoms are stress-related.

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Dealing with Stress

Think about the ways you currently cope with stress in your life. Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy? Are they helpful or unproductive?



Healthy Ways to Manage Stress

If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to handle stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. Here are four things to think about when deciding which option to choose:

- 1. Avoid | 2. Alter | 3. Adapt | 4. Accept**

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to managing it. Experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Change the situation by:

- Avoiding the stressor
- Altering the stressor

Change your reaction by:

- Adapting to the stressor
- Accepting the stressor

You'll learn more about these strategies in the coming weeks.

Identify Stressors—and Rectify



1. Use the grid below to identify times when you feel stressed.
2. Recognize your feelings, and report how you react.
3. Review the grid again at the end of the challenge.

	1	2	3	4
Stressor				
Physically I feel:				
Emotionally I feel:				
My response is:				
I will choose to: (Pick from the four A's.)				