

# Rolling with the Punches

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## Managing Stress in Modern Life

Stress is a universal phenomenon and there's no avoiding it. It's been around since the beginning of time and will no doubt be around at the end. The fact is stress in small doses is actually essential for our survival, but in the modern world where the punches can keep rolling it's important we understand how to minimise stress, manage stress and bounce back after stressful situations.

## What do we mean by stress?

The word 'stress' is used all the time but it's important to understand what exactly this term means. Robert Sapolsky, a world-renowned expert in stress from Stanford University describes stress as anything that knocks us out of homeostatic balance.

*Simply put anything that stops you from being relaxed, makes your blood boil, heart beat fast or gives you a fright.*

Stress plays an important role in the 'fight or flight' response. This is when we find ourselves in a situation where we have to either fight our way out, or run for our lives. As soon as our body picks up on the stressor our arousal spikes (through some awesome internal processes) and we find ourselves ready to react, for example, if you ever did a paper run and had to run away from a dog. In this way stress can actually be beneficial for us, playing an important part in our safety and survival by improving our performance in certain situations or with certain tasks.



## The problem with stress

The problem with stress comes from the fact we are far more intelligent than most mammals. Not only can we experience stressful situations in our everyday lives, we can also anticipate stressful situations that might occur and ruminate over stressful situations that have happened in the past. The ability to anticipate and contemplate stress is compounded by the fact that in our modern lives we are subjected to more stressors than ever before, for most of which it's not appropriate to fight our way out of, or run away from. To use the previous example, if you replace the angry dog with your boss a 'fight' or 'flight' response may not be appropriate.

## The good news about stress

The good news is that stress is largely based on our perception of the stressor. That is why what is stressful for one person may not be for another. We have the ability to adapt and learn to manage stress and become more resilient. This adaptation takes place through a process of super-compensation. Simply put, when we experience stress and have time to recover, we adapt and become more resilient to stress than we were previously.

Along with sufficient recovery there are other practices we can put in place to minimise and manage stress. Check out the following practical tips to get you started.



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# 8 Tips to help manage stress

## 1. Take breaks from the stressors

Whether it's a holiday, a walk out of the office or switching off the emails for an hour, it is essential we give ourselves time to recover from stress.

## 2. Keep things in perspective.

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Try to avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

## 3. Move

Humans are designed to be active. Movement stimulates the brain and body and is essential for good health. Getting active is energising and needs to part of every day.

## 4. Smile and laugh

Our brains are interconnected with our emotions and facial expressions. Don't be afraid to smile or laugh as this can help relieve some of that tension and improve the situation.

## 5. Make space

Spend some time away from technology. Create a technology free room in your house. Take time out in your favourite scenic spot.

## 6. Sleep

7+ hours of sleep a night is essential for recovery. Non-pharmacological sleep therapy simply involves getting into a routine, getting up at the same time every day, and ensuring that your limbs cool off as bed time gets close. Letting your limbs cool off prepares your body for sleep, so make sure you don't exercise or have a hot bath close to bedtime.

## 7. Make connections

Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and can listen to you strengthens your resilience.

## 8. Accept that change is a part of living

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that can't be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

**STRESS  
+ RECOVERY  
= RESILIENCE**



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