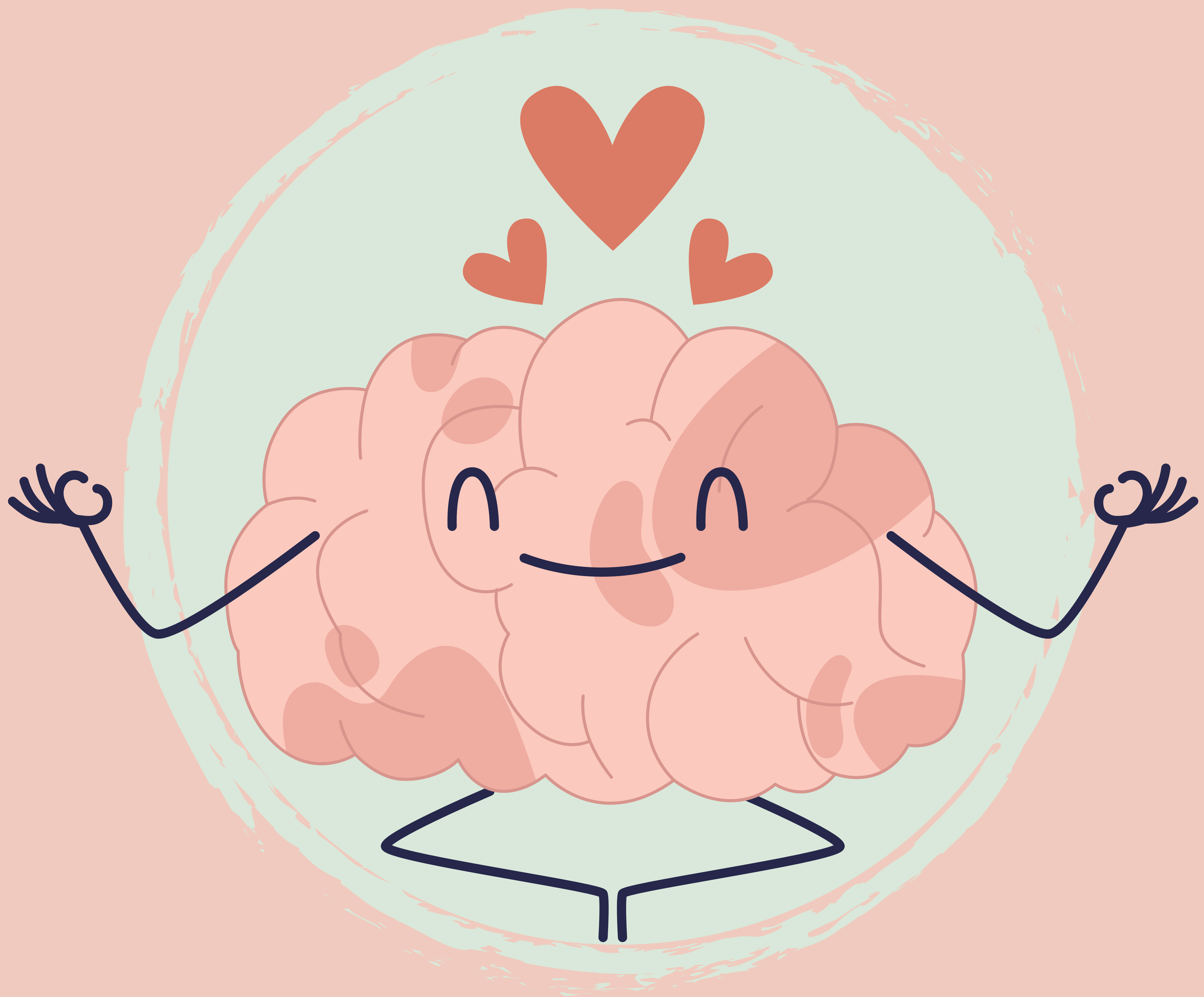


THE IMPORTANCE OF STRESS MANAGEMENT



Stress is a very common experience. All of us, every day, experience stress and it's important to have the right tools for managing your levels so they don't get out-of-hand! There are many different exercises that can help you relieve these feelings

Healthy ways of coping with stress

When finding tactics for coping with stress and anxiety, it is important to remember that different techniques can be helpful in certain situations. However, overusing one method of coping could lead you into another unhealthy pattern. An example of this could be turning to alcohol to block out the feelings of anxiety which might then lead to addiction.

It's best trying a few strategies and learning what works best for you.

Relaxation

One of the best ways to manage stress is through relaxation. [\(1\)](#) Relaxation can be achieved in many different ways, from guided meditation and visualization exercises all the way down your choice of activity or hobby - whatever makes you happiest!

When we are relaxed there is more space between ourselves and what may have caused anxiety. There are many meditations and visualisations that you can find online. But even just taking 5 minutes out a few times a day and

sitting quietly can be beneficial. Close your eyes and count down from 10. Count slowly and imagine your body relaxing with each lower number. Feel your body melting into the chair. When you get down to 1 imagine you are in your 'happy place'. This can be somewhere you have been happy in your past, maybe from your childhood. Or it could be a beautiful garden or a beach. Take yourself there for a few minutes. This exercise sounds simple but can have really profound effects on your stress levels and well-being.

Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep is also a great stress-buster. [\(2\)](#) When you wake from 7-9 hours of restorative sleep you are well equipped to face the day, stress-free! If you haven't slept well, you are running on empty from the get-go. Feeling tired can cause us to make mistakes which can lead to stress. Plus, if you aren't sleeping well you may then spend the day stressed that you won't sleep well again tonight.

To give yourself the best chance of quality sleep, go to bed and get up at the same time – the body clock likes routine. Try not to eat at least two hours before bed, avoid alcohol and caffeine after 7pm. Before bed time try turning the lights down low and turning off the television, having a relaxing bath or shower, reading a book. And the best way to ensure your sleep is not disturbed is to take all electronics with a screen out of the bedroom. The blue light and EMFs emitted from phones affect our body clock and increase the stress hormone cortisol.

We all know the feeling of stress creeping up on us, but it doesn't have to be a bad thing. The best way for you to find relief is by first identifying where their stress comes from in the first place. Then fix that problem instead of just dealing with symptoms.

Procrastination (3)

We often put things off to the last minute and then have the stress of trying to squeeze too much into too little time. Knowing that a deadline is coming up can cause stress. But instead of fretting about it, sit down and plan your work and time so that the deadline can be met easily and stress free. Once that deadline is met, if we have left it to the last minute we then often get stressed that we didn't do our best and that the work wasn't up to standard. Again, planning beforehand would prevent this. But also remember that it is in the past and nothing can be done about it to change it. There is no point over thinking what has happened in the past because it is history- done and gone. Learn to let those feelings of regret go.

Time management

is a critical skill for anyone who's juggling multiple responsibilities, but it can be especially challenging when you're struggling with mental illness. (4) Many people say yes to too many things (it's human nature to want to please other people). However, it can lead to feelings of hopelessness, exhaustion and stress! The key here? Getting good at prioritizing tasks to keep stress low and learning to say no sometimes.

Breaking jobs down into manageable chunks and giving yourself credit when you complete each one is another way to keep stress at bay. [\(5\)](#)

Life isn't meant to be easy, but sometimes it's important to decide what is truly worth stressing over and what things are just background noise that we needn't concern ourselves with. This may seem like an impossible task for some people; however, practicing stress management techniques means you too could learn how to identify your true priorities in life which will help you focus on the priority tasks at hand rather than worrying about all of the unimportant ones wasting your time and energy both physically and mentally.

Physical exercise

A great way to deal with stress is to do some exercise. When you are stressed, cortisol levels are high. Your body is in the fight/flight state and instinctively is ready to run. So, doing exercise uses up this excess energy produced by the stress response. In addition, exercise produces endorphins which make us feel good too. [\(6\)](#)

Unfortunately, stress makes us feel less inclined to get up and do that exercise especially if it is not something that we usually do. [\(7\)](#) So rather than doing it when you feel stressed, try making exercise a habit. That way you are more likely to exercise if you feel stressed.

During Covid stress levels have been particularly high, especially for health professionals. I know a few that find running, cycling and 'doing weights' really helps reduce their stress levels and prepare them to face another stressful shift.

Put yourself first for a change

I know it sounds like a cliché but remember to take time out for some self-care. Treating yourself well is a good way to cope with stress and stay healthy and happy. If you have good emotional reserves then stressful moments become more manageable. Do things that make your heart sing. Think about what you enjoy.

Enjoying days out with friends/family, treat yourself to something nice like a new pair of shoes or a massage. Listen to your favourite music and maybe even have a dance. What is it they say? "Dance like nobody's watching". That is some great advice and really works to lower stress levels. Something that I find helps reduce my stress levels is playing an instrument. It does help that my instrument of choice is drums so I can hit them really hard and take out my frustrations on them. I always feel much better afterwards plus I am improving my expertise at the same time.

I know of someone who plays the piano. She used to play the funeral march when she was stressed. It sounds counter-intuitive but it really worked for her.[\(8\)](#) There are no rules. We are all different. Just do what makes you feel better.

References

1. Six relaxation techniques to reduce stress

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/six-relaxation-techniques-to-reduce-stress>

2. Stress And Sleep: How To Overcome Anxiety And Get More Rest

<https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/stress/stress-and-sleep-how-to-overcome-anxiety-and-get-more-rest/>

3. 9 Realistic Ways To Stop Procrastinating And Stress Less

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3056134/9-realistic-ways-to-stop-procrastinating-and-stress-less>

4. Stress Management: Managing Your Time

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/av2103>

5. Better health. Every Mind Matters. Feeling Stressed?

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/stress/>

6. Exercise, Depression, and the Brain

<https://www.healthline.com/health/depression/exercise>

7. The Effects of Stress on Physical Activity and Exercise

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3894304/>

8. Music therapy and mental health problems

<https://www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/music-therapy-and-mental-health-challenges/>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm#>

<https://www.innerhealthstudio.com/stress-management-exercises.html>