

Coping With Uncertainty

Uncertain times can leave us feeling anxious and stressed, and for many of us, life feels particularly uncertain lately. Between political events, world conflicts and natural disasters, it's not surprising that many of us are feeling like we're on unstable ground.

Keep in mind that in life, no one can avoid the unexpected. However, these simple steps can help you better face life's uncertainties.

Steps to better face uncertainties

- **Be kind to yourself.** Some people are better at dealing with uncertainties than others, so don't beat yourself up if your tolerance for unpredictability is lower than others. Remind yourself that it might take time for the stressful situation to resolve, and be patient with yourself in the meantime.
- **Reflect on past successes.** Chances are you've overcome stressful events in the past. Give yourself credit. Reflect on what you did during that event that was helpful and what you might like to do differently this time.
- **Develop new skills.** When life is relatively calm, make a point to try things outside your comfort zone. From standing up to a difficult boss to trying a new sport, taking risks helps you develop confidence and skills that come in handy when life veers off course.
- **Limit exposure to news.** When we're stressed about something, it can be hard to look away. But compulsively checking the news only keeps you wound up. Try to limit your check-ins and avoid the news during vulnerable times of the day, such as right before bedtime.
- **Avoid dwelling on things you can't control.** When uncertainty strikes, many people immediately imagine worst-case scenarios. Get out of the habit of ruminating on negative events.
- **Take your advice.** Ask yourself: If a friend came to me with this worry, what would I tell them? Imagining your situation from the outside can often provide perspective and fresh ideas.
- **Engage in self-care.** Don't let stress derail your healthy routines. Make efforts to eat well, exercise and get enough sleep. Many people find stress release in practices such as yoga and meditation.
- **Seek support from those you trust.** Many people isolate themselves when they're stressed or worried. But social support is important, so reach out to family and friends.
- **Control what you can.** Focus on the things that are within your control, even if they're as simple as weekly meal planning or laying out your clothes the night before a stressful day. Establish routines to give your days and weeks some comforting structure.
- **Ask for help.** If you're having trouble managing stress and coping with uncertainty on your own, ask for help. Start by contacting your Employee Assistance Program.

What is resilience?

Of the many factors that go into coping with uncertainty, the most important may be resiliency. Resilience is the measure of our ability to welcome challenges, overcome adversity and get back on track to achieving our goals.

Resilience is more than coping; it's about confronting crises and difficult situations without getting overwhelmed by them. Resilient people are better able to handle life's stressors and adapt to changing situations. Being resilient can help protect you from depression, stress and anxiety, too.

Some of the characteristics of resilient people include:

- Strong relationships
- Self-motivation
- A positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities
- Skills in communication and problem-solving
- Self-awareness
- Emotional control

There will always be periods of relative stability and times when everything seems up in the air. While times of upheaval can be stressful, there are things you can do to cope with this challenging environment:

- **Find a healthy balance.** Your work is important, but it's unhealthy for you mentally, physically and socially if you live, breathe and sleep your job. Get off the rollercoaster and away from the stress and uncertainty by surrounding yourself with friends and family and finding positive outlets to spend your free time.
- **Be positive.** There is only so much you can control. How you feel about your situation is one of those things. Look for the silver lining and practice positive self-affirmations—it can change your mood and outlook on life.
- **Look for the gray.** Even though it may seem so, not everything is black and white or gain and loss. Search for the middle ground. It can be a far less stressful place.

How to Manage Anger and Stress

When facing change, it's fairly common to feel anger and stress. It's important, however, to remember that allowing such emotions to run you leads to mental, physical and social consequences. If anger is getting the best of you, there are several steps you can take to manage it in a healthier way:

- **Relax and calm down.** Take deep breaths. Count to 10 and let the tension escape from your body. Try relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga and progressive muscle relaxation.
- **Remove yourself from the environment.** If a person or situation is causing you to feel extremely angry, or if you feel that you cannot talk about your emotions or express your anger positively, walk away.
- **Identify the source.** What exactly is making you angry? When you recognize the cause, approach it in a positive, productive way.
- **Think before taking action.** Carefully consider the consequences of your response. Will you regret saying what is on your mind? Is there a better way to express your anger than the first impulse that came to you? Do not overreact. Avoid making assumptions or guesses; know the facts before you speak out about someone or something.

- **Assert yourself appropriately.** If you feel strongly about something, do not hold back from saying what is on your mind. Let the other person know what you want. Be clear and direct in your message.
- **Divert your attention.** If there is nothing you can do to change the situation, (e.g., you are stuck in a terrible traffic jam that is making you increasingly irritated), think of something else. Focus on a pleasant thought, an upcoming vacation or a happy memory.
- **Find humor in the situation.** When appropriate, learn to laugh at life and conflicts with others. Break the tension and defuse the situation with a smile, a joke or a funny (but not sarcastic) comment.
- **Be patient.** Try to be tolerant and empathetic of others. Attempt to understand their situations and behaviors.
- **Find a substitute outlet for anger.** Instead of acting on an aggressive urge, find a creative outlet for your energy. Start an exercise program. Take up a physically challenging new sport like kickboxing. Try a new hobby or artistic endeavor such as painting.
- **Get advice from others.** If you simply do not know how to deal with an angry feeling or situation, ask friends or family for suggestions on how they got through similar situations.

There are also several ways you can alleviate stress in your day-to-day life. Here are 10:

1. **Get enough sleep.** If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.
2. **Schedule a realistic day.** If you can't avoid back-to-back appointments, try to at least give yourself a few moments for a breathing spell.
3. **Do not rely on your memory.** Write down appointment times, assignment due dates, etc. As an old Chinese proverb states, "The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory."
4. **Be prepared to wait.** A paperback, crossword puzzle or cell phone game can make a wait in a post-office line almost pleasant.
5. **Procrastination is stressful.** Whatever you want to do tomorrow, do today; whatever you want to do today, do it now.
6. **Relax your standards.** The world will not end if the grass does not get mowed this weekend or if the sheets have to be changed on Sunday instead of Saturday.
7. **Learn to say 'no.'** Saying no to extra projects, social events and activities you do not have the time or energy for takes practice.
8. **Eliminate destructive self-talk.** "I can't ..." or "I'm too inexperienced to ..." are negative thoughts that can increase stress levels.
9. **Take time for yourself.** Develop a belief that everyone needs quiet time every day to relax and be alone.

Turn off your phone. Want to take a long bath, meditate, sleep or read without interruption? Drum up the courage to temporarily disconnect.

Here when you need us.

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