



## Managing stress can help reduce psychiatric symptoms

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We deal with stress on a daily basis — whether it is good stress, such as getting married, or bad stress, such as the death of a loved one, and all levels of stress in between.

How people deal with stress can impact their mental illnesses and the severity of the symptoms. Scientists do not have a full understanding of why some people have symptoms of mental illness and others do not.

They also cannot predict how many episodes of symptoms a person will have.

The Stress-Vulnerability Model is a theory that scientists have looked at to see how stress and biological vulnerability may contribute to mental illness.

The term "biological vulnerability" refers to people who are born with or who acquire early in life a tendency to develop a problem in a specific medical area. This means that a person may be more prone to develop asthma, diabetes, [high blood pressure](#) or a mental illness based on his or her biological makeup.

However, genetics is only one factor that determines whether a person will develop a disorder. Stress also is believed to play an important part in the development of psychiatric symptoms. Stress can trigger the onset of symptoms or cause them to be worse.

Everyone experiences stress in his or her own way. What one person finds stressful may not be stressful for someone else. Reducing stress can help reduce symptoms. The *Illness Management and Recovery Workbook* lists some guidelines to help reduce

common sources of stress:

- Identify situations that provoked stress for you in the past. Come up with ways to handle the situation differently in the future.
- Set reasonable expectations for yourself and try not to do too much or too little.
- Maintain healthy habits such as eating well, getting enough sleep and exercising regularly.
- Identify and seek out supportive relationships where you feel comfortable sharing what you are thinking and feeling.
- Avoid situations where people argue with you or criticize you.
- Don't be too hard on yourself.
- Give yourself credit for accomplishments, talents and strengths.

Stress is a natural part of life and everyone experiences it. It is helpful to have strategies for dealing with stress when it occurs to reduce the harmful effect it may have on you. Just as stress affects people differently, coping strategies are different as well. It is important to find what works for you.

To cope with stress:

- Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation.
- Use positive self-talk.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Take a walk or do some other form of physical activity.
- Write down your thoughts and

feelings in a journal.

- Use your artistic side by drawing or doing a craft project.
- Engage in a hobby.

The more strategies you have, the more likely you are to cope with stress without it increasing your symptoms. Keep an open mind and experiment with new ways to cope with stress.