Stress. The word itself probably makes you cringe or recall moments of high anxiety. In fact, just talking about stress actually causes stress. However, what if I told you that stress is not necessarily a bad thing?

There are two different types of stress: eustress and distress. **Eustress** can increase productivity and allow us to perform at our very best. We become more alert and stimulated when eustress is introduced into our lives; however, there is a point where you can move from the desirable high performance stage into distress. **Distress** causes fatigue, lack of motivation, and irritability, and long periods of distress can lead to serious health issues.

If you can learn to recognize signs that you are becoming stressed, such as fingernail biting or losing sleep, you may be able to control it before it becomes distress. Once you identify signs of stress, try these three tips to keep it under control.

• Set priorities and remember to place everything into the bigger picture or complete context of your life and goals.
• Find a hobby that allows you to rid yourself of extra stress.
• Reach out to your close family or friends who can provide emotional support or make you feel at ease.

Once you’ve got your stress levels balanced, watch your productivity soar!


SMART FACTS

- **70%** Percentage of people who report a lot of stress that experience sleeplessness.
- **72%** Percentage of people who identify work as a stressor.
- **32%** Percentage of parents that believe they do an excellent job of stress management.

Have you been struggling with lingering headaches, fatigue, or lack of motivation? While you may assume that these conditions are due to an illness or your sleep patterns, you should also consider that they could be linked to chronic stress. Chronic stress can affect your body, mood, and behavior. It may also have severe effects on your health that are tough to reverse if not managed early. While stress affects everyone differently, the most common related health problems are:

- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Fatigue/restlessness
- Trouble sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Anxiety
- Lack of focus
- Muscle tension (especially in the shoulders)
- Irritability/quick to anger
- Sadness/feelings of depression
- Tobacco/alcohol use
- Social withdrawal
- Change in appetite (over or under-eating)

If these symptoms occur too often or last too long, they can snowball into bigger health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, depression, or accelerated aging. It could also make it more difficult for your body to fight off viral infections, such as the flu or common cold.

The good news is that there are many healthy ways you can manage your stress. Every person is different, so try not to give up if the first method you try does not relieve your symptoms.

- **Exercise:** Regular physical activity can boost your mood and energy levels while reducing stress. Yoga and tai chi can be effective tools, or even simply taking a walk.
- **Deep breathing or meditation:** Focusing on your breathing can relax your muscles and mind. This can be done by sitting or lying in a comfortable position, closing your eyes, and inhaling and exhaling slowly. Massages can also help you relax and release tension.
- **Focus on healthy habits:** “Stress eating” is a common way that people deal with a stressful situation. While it may distract you and make you feel better in the short term, it can lead to obesity and other health problems in the long run. Concentrate on eating a balanced diet, which will help you feel better overall and keep you alert. Avoid excessive caffeine and alcohol intake and make sure to get plenty of sleep.
- **Talk to your family or friends:** Lean on your support system during tough times and don’t be afraid to ask for help. You may also consider seeing a physician or counselor to assist in managing your stress.

Spring is approaching and many of us are daydreaming about vacations and time off; however, if you’re anything like the rest of America, you probably leave a fair number of eligible vacation days on the table each year. In fact, the average American reports using only half, or 51%, of their eligible paid time off.

Using vacation days isn’t just about planning a trip to the beach. It provides an opportunity for you to unplug from your normal routine. This down time benefits your health and may make you more productive at your job when you return. Here are 3 ways time-off can improve your well-being:

Benefits your health: Taking time away from work and routine allows the body to recharge its batteries. This revitalizing state decreases stress and improves your mood.

Changes your perspective: Stepping back from your work, whether it’s to travel the world or get some household chores done, allows you to look at life through a different lens. This change in perspective may help you appreciate things that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Increases your focus: How many hours have you spent at work wishing you were somewhere else? Taking vacation days can prevent boredom and keep you focused while at your job.


Anna* was under stress when she came to me. She considered what her five “big rocks” were in life. Rocks will only fit in a jar if you put them in first and then let sand (less important things) fill in around them. If you first fill the jar with sand, the rocks won’t fit. Likewise, once Anne realized her big rocks, it became clearer where she wanted to spend her time and energy.

We all need to know what our rocks are. Many people are stressed, feeling they have too much to do. Recognizing what’s important is the first step in choosing what can get done on the “to do” list!

- Trina Stutzman, Everence Certified Wellness Coach

*All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.
Snap peas, also known as sugar snap peas, are a cross between a snow pea and green pea. This particular variation has pods that are easily edible, making this a quick snack option or an easy addition to a recipe that doesn’t require taking the peas out of the pod. They are known for their sweet, crispy taste that can appeal even to non-veggie lovers. Although small, these peas are full of important vitamins and nutrients. One 3-ounce serving provides more than half of the recommended daily intake of vitamin C and half the amount of niacin. They also provide 20% of the daily recommended iron amount for men and 10% for women.

**How to select**
Choose snap peas that are bright green and free from marks or blemishes. They should be firm to the touch, not soft or wilted.

**How to store**
Fresh snap peas have the highest amount of antioxidants, as well as the sweetest flavor, so serve them as soon as possible. Both taste and health benefits will decline after being stored for too long, but you can store peas for up to two days in a perforated bag in your refrigerator’s crisper section.

**How to prepare**
Snap peas can be eaten raw or cooked. Whichever method is used, the stem and strings from each pea pod should first be removed and discarded. Sautéed or steamed peas should become more tender, but still maintain their crisp texture. When cooking snap peas in a skillet, toss them with olive oil and seasonings of choice. Cook them until small, scorched brown spots appear on the outside of the pods, no more than 3-5 minutes.


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**RECIPE OF THE MONTH: Lemony Snap Peas**

**Ingredients**
- 8 cups water
- 12 ounces sugar snap peas, with stems and strings removed
- ½ teaspoon grated lemon rind
- 2 Tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 shallot, minced

**Directions**
1. Bring 8 cups of water to a boil in a large Dutch oven. Add peas and cook 30 seconds, or until crisp-tender. Drain and plunge into ice water; drain. Slice half of peas diagonally.
2. Combine lemon rind and remaining ingredients in a medium bowl and stir with a whisk. Add peas and toss to coat.

Makes 4 servings (1 serving = 1 cup).

**Nutritional Info**
PER SERVING: 73 calories, 3.6g fat, 0.5g saturated fat, 2.5g monounsaturated fat, 0.4g polyunsaturated fat, 8.4g carbohydrates, 2.5g protein, 154mg sodium, 2.3g fiber, 39mg calcium, 1.8mg iron