Take action to stress less

Follow these steps to help take action so that you can get a grip on stress – and learn how to manage it.

1. Make a list. Include all the things that bring you stress – from that special project at work to family get-togethers or your finances.

2. Edit your stressors. Cross off all the things on your list that you can’t control.

3. What’s left on your list? Think of ways you can change the situation or lower stress. Many times, just seeing one small thing that you can take action on can significantly reduce stress.

4. Assign items. Look for places where you can get help from others, both at work and at home.

5. Review what you crossed off. Remind yourself that these items are a source of unnecessary stress because they’re out of your control.

Here’s an example. You may feel stressed about planning a family holiday on time for the summer, or maybe you worry that you won’t have enough money to pay for it all. You also worry if you don’t go – because then you’ll regret missing out on holiday time with your family.

Make a list of your stressors:

At a glance

Mindfulness takes practice and can be worth the effort.

Practising mindfulness doesn’t mean that you’re immune to what’s going on around you. Instead, it means that you can learn to see the chaos as it is without being reactive to it or blaming someone else for your reaction.
• Completing your holiday planning
• Worry that you’ll regret not going
• Budgeting

Next look at what you can’t control. You’re not in control of future emotions.

But you can make sure to plan ahead to see if a holiday fits in your annual budget. Maybe plan a shorter holiday or a “stay-cation” this summer.

Think of ways you can get all your planning done. Breaking tasks into manageable pieces makes just about any project less overwhelming. Plus, it can also help reduce stress. Maybe see if you and a family member can plan together.

Now you are doing what you can with what you can control. And that’s all you can ask of anyone.

Four steps to adjust during stressful times

1. **Become curious about what is happening.** Are there visible cues around your habitual behaviour, such as being short with others or pulling your hair? Consider the inner experiences unfolding as well – how are you feeling, what are you thinking? Notice what it’s like to relate to a difficult experience with curiosity.

2. **Take a mindful pause.** This will allow you to step back from the situation and calm the intensity of your thoughts before responding. By creating space between the situation and your response, you’re able to gain perspective and see other ways of responding (ways that we often don’t see in the heat of the moment). If you can’t see the situation from other perspectives, or don’t see more helpful ways of responding, acknowledge that you need more time. If you can physically walk away, do so. Otherwise, take a couple of deep breaths.

3. **Respond in the best way you can.** Consider both timing and delivery. Maybe honesty is needed, but you’re not yet ready to have a productive conversation. If you’re not ready to respond in the best way that you can, consider asking to come back to the discussion later. There are ways to advocate for yourself in a way that is done with kindness and respect, while holding firm to your boundaries and needs. A simple response could be, “I’m sorry, can we revisit the conversation after I’ve processed my thoughts?”

4. **Mindfully reflect.** Although mindfulness is about being in the present moment, we can still learn from our past by bringing our new-found knowledge to the present. Consider how you managed your response. What worked well? What felt challenging? What else would have been helpful? Are you carrying any regret or guilt that needs your kind attention?