



Stop Stress. Be Well.

ACTION PLAN

STEP 1: AWARENESS

Stress has a way of becoming chronic as the worries of everyday living weigh us down. Or perhaps you've become accustomed to stress in your life, and you allow whatever is currently the most stressful problem to dictate what you will do each day. Everyone needs pleasure, productivity and creativity in their lives and chronic stress robs us of these.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY YOUR STRESS LEVELS

Where do you put yourself now? How do you know when you've passed the moderate point? Identify for yourself the small changes you can detect in your mood as you move up the continuum. This may take a few days of observing yourself, but if you are like most people, (and chances are good that you are!) your stress level will climb in a predictable pattern. If you take time to learn your emotional cues, you can learn to regulate your stress so that you spend more of your time in the "low zone" (at numbers 1-5).



- 1 — I'm creatively and cheerfully engaged in life.
- 2 — I'm relaxed and expect to stay this way.
- 3-5 — I can handle stresses and think of positive solutions to my challenges.
- 6-7 — I'm moderately irritable, anxious or overwhelmed, and stresses feel burdensome.

- 8 — My problems seem unsolvable. Many things are irritating or upsetting me.
- 9 — Help! I'm about to lose it!
- 10 — I have chart-topping negative emotions

STEP 3: UNDERSTAND THE MAIN STRESSORS IN YOUR LIFE

Clearly some people have more stressful environments than others, and those people will likely pay a toll for it unless they learn to manage stress and improve their quality of life. For example, the stress of becoming a caregiver often results in health difficulties and emotional health challenges. If you are a caregiver, it's especially important that you learn stress-management skills so that you can keep yourself in the "low zone," find ways to enjoy your life and allow your caregiving to have moments of satisfaction and joy.



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ACTION PLAN (CONT.)

STEP 4: LEARN TO LIVE IN THE LOW ZONE

Once you've passed the mid-zone mark into the high-stress zone, it's time to take a stress-management moment. Maybe that means that you call a friend, take a short 5-minute walk outdoors, remind yourself of what you can and cannot change or keep a funny book on hand that you can visit when you need a laugh. Whatever works best for you, take the time to bring your stress level back closer to the "low zone." Notice what happens to your body and mind when you take these breaks.

STEP 5: KNOW THE BENEFITS OF LOW-ZONE LIVING

You'll feel more creative, more alive, and more able to enjoy small moments of happiness. Furthermore, you reserve your "high zone stress responses" for times when it's more appropriate. When life and death are not on the line, we do not need chart-topping emotional responses. So let's learn to enjoy the gifts of life and put aside the stresses whenever we can!



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IDEAS FOR PARTICIPATION

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Self-talk is one way to deal with stress. We all talk to ourselves; sometimes we talk out loud but usually we keep self-talk in our heads. Self-talk can be positive ("I can do this" or "Things will work out") or negative ("I'll never get well" or "I'm so stupid"). Negative self-talk increases stress. Positive self-talk helps you calm down and control stress. With practice, you can learn to turn negative thoughts into positive ones.

For example:

Negative

"I can't do this."
"Everything is going wrong."
"I hate it when this happens."

Positive

"I'll do the best I can."
"I can handle things if I take one step at a time."
"I know how to deal with this; I've done it before."

To help you feel better, practice positive self-talk every day — in the car, at your desk, before you go to bed or whenever you notice negative thoughts. Having trouble getting started? Try positive statements such as these:

"I've got this."
"I can get help if I need it."
"We can work it out."
"I won't let this problem get me down."
"Things could be worse."
"I'm human, and we all make mistakes."
"Someday I'll laugh about this."
"I can deal with this situation."

Remember: Positive self-talk helps you relieve stress and deal with the situations that cause you stress.

DAILY RELAXATION

Relaxation is more than sitting in your favorite chair watching TV. To relieve stress, relaxation should calm the tension in your mind and body. Deep breathing is a form of relaxation you can learn and a good skill to practice as you start or end your day.

- Count to 10 before you speak.
- Take three to five deep breaths.
- Walk away from the stressful situation, and say you'll handle it later.
- Go for a walk.
- Don't be afraid to say "I'm sorry" if you make a mistake.
- Set your watch 5 to 10 minutes ahead to avoid the stress of being late.



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IDEAS FOR PARTICIPATION (CONT.)

EMERGENCY STRESS STOPPERS

Emergency stress stoppers help you deal with stress on the spot. You may need different stress stoppers for different situations and sometimes it helps to combine them. Try these emergency stress stoppers:

- Count to 10 before you speak.
- Take three to five deep breaths.
- Walk away from the stressful situation, and say you'll handle it later.
- Go for a walk.
- Don't be afraid to say "I'm sorry" if you make a mistake.
- Set your watch five to 10 minutes ahead to avoid the stress of being late.
- Break down big problems into smaller parts. For example, answer one letter or phone call per day, instead of dealing with everything at once.
- Drive in the slow lane or avoid busy roads to help you stay calm while driving.
- Smell a rose, hug a loved one or smile at your neighbor.
- Consider meditation or prayer to break the negative cycle.

FINDING PLEASURE

When stress makes you feel bad, do something that makes you feel good. *Try to do at least one thing every day that you enjoy, even if you only do it for 15 minutes.*

Such as:

- Start an art project (oil paint, sketch, create a scrap book or finger paint with grandchildren).
- Take up a hobby, new or old.
- Read a favorite book, short story, magazine or newspaper.
- Have coffee or a meal with friends.
- Play golf, tennis, ping-pong or bowl.
- Sew, knit or crochet.
- Listen to music during or after you practice relaxation.
- Take a nature walk — listen to the birds, identify trees and flowers.
- Make a list of everything you still want to do in life.
- Watch an old movie on TV or rent a video.
- Take a class at your local college.



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COMMUNICATION TEMPLATE

Use these templates to communicate about and promote your event. Customize them to fit your needs. Add a personal touch when possible for greater appeal to your audience.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Hello <STAFF/DEPARTMENT NAMES>!

Planning to tackle a new goal? Are you struggling to work towards a personal resolution? Some people join a new gym. Others try to lose weight. Some just want to find happiness in the simple things. Or maybe you want to train for your first marathon. These are all good goals, and vary from person to person, but the question is, will making a resolution help you achieve them?

It turns out, the New Year may not be the best time to make those momentous changes. January can be stressful enough with getting back into the swing of things, so you may not be in the best mental and physical state to start a tough New Year's resolution. For some, resolutions can start at any point during the year.

Resolution Shmesolution – Our goal is to help you build a solid foundation of positivity, so you'll be set up for success as you tackle health goals throughout the year. During the next month, with the support of the American Heart Association, we want to help build yourself up. Acknowledge everything you can be proud of and what you've already accomplished. Take time to appreciate the people who helped you get here. Thank your body for all the amazing things it does to keep you healthy and strong!

The journey starts next week! Together let's be grateful, and come what may!

<YOUR NAME>



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COMMUNICATION TEMPLATE (CONT.)

ANNOUNCEMENT WITH DETAILS

Hello <STAFF/DEPARTMENT NAME> -

NOW is the time to acknowledge everything you can be proud of and what you'll accomplish within this next month as we walk the path together in creating real, lasting health changes. When you have a positive attitude and outlook, you'll tackle the challenges in your life better!

The American Heart Association's [BE MINDFUL : BE WELL At Work Challenge](#) begins this week! Participating in this challenge can set you up for success, so you can be [Healthy For Good](#).

To participate, print the [BE MINDFUL : BE WELL](#) challenge handout and keep it in a close place; hang on your wall, keep at the front of your binder/notebook, or next to your computer. Throughout the month, mark each column with an "X" as you complete each daily task MEDIATE, GIVE THANKS, and do SOMETHING FUN. As the week comes to an end, reflect on each completed column – have you fulfilled your mindfulness challenge for the week? How can you set yourself up for success for the next?

Visit www.healthyforgood.org/be-well for more information on practicing mindfulness, managing stress, keeping mind and body fit, and more.

Let the journey begin!
<YOUR NAME>



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COMMUNICATION TEMPLATE (CONT.)

SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT WITH ENCOURAGEMENT

Hello <STAFF/DEPARTMENT NAME> -

How is your [BE MINDFUL : BE WELL](#) journey going? Are you celebrating any personal wins this week? Please feel free to reply all to share any celebrations with the team!

Here are a few tips to keep you mindful, grateful, and stress-free as you come into the last stretch of your Healthy For Good resolutions:

- If something frustrates you today, take a moment to reframe and find something that IS going your way – write it down!
- During your lunch meal, try to put your fork down between each bite, take a sip of water, and really savor the flavors rather than wolfing it down
- Think of someone who makes you laugh at work, invite them to sit with you at lunch
- Write a note of appreciation to someone you really care about – it could be handwritten, a text, or maybe you feel bold and it's a phone call!
- Take a break from your computer screen – close your eyes for a minute of meditation, direct your kindness to yourself with a phrase like “May I be happy.” or direct your kindness to someone you love with a phrase like “May you be happy”.

POST EVENT

Hello <STAFF/DEPARTMENT NAME>!

Thanks to everyone who joined us in our [BE MINDFUL : BE WELL At Work Challenge](#) supported by the American Heart Association. We had a great turnout and a lot of commitment to be more mindful and practice gratitude daily. <ADD MORE HERE IF DESIRED, e.g., announcement of any shared celebrations or stories> but we know that resolutions and goals should not just be a one and done deal, so we encourage you to keep up the good work and take advantage of the many resources offered by the American Heart Association. Visit healthyforgood.heart.org/be-well to find out more.

Don't forget that part of living healthier lives is helping the American Heart Association fund lifesaving research. Go to the [Sacramento Heart & Stroke Walk](#) page to contribute now.

Cheers to health and gratitude,

<YOUR NAME>



Healthy For Good™