

Summer 2021

## How to Manage Your Stress

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This last year has been unlike any in our life time. In addition, nursing is an incredibly stressful career. From the moment nursing students start their education program to when they retire, they face difficult situations and stressors on a daily basis. In fact, stress and burnout affect 10-70% of nurses. Sources of stress can be the residents, families and cases they observe, time constraints to get work done, conflict with leadership or co-workers, or a feeling of lack of control in their work environment. Stress can lead to fatigue, exhaustion, and detachment from their work which may lead to resident safety concerns. Therefore, successful management of stress is essential to the well-being of not only the nurse but patients as well. So how do nurses manage high levels of stress and the accompanying emotions? Below are some methods nurses can help deal with stress and prevent burnout.

### **Talk About It**

It's easy for nurses to finish a shift, come home, and just want to zone out in front of the TV or computer. However, the stresses don't go away. Challenging events and situations may replay when the nurse is trying to sleep, and when the next shift rolls around, the stressor is still there. After a long and harried shift, it may help to talk about it.

### **Recruit Support**

Nursing co-workers are a tight-knit family. They are down in the trenches with one another and for this reason, talking about work-related stressors with another is extremely valuable. Basically, they can all relate. Having a therapeutic vent session is extremely helpful not just to get concerns out in the open, but to share ideas on how to improve things. Sometimes it helps to arrange a gathering outside of work by Social Distancing meal or Zoom meal. Night-shift workers can meet for breakfast, and day workers can have a late lunch or dinner. By removing the group from the environmental source of stress (work), nurses can be more candid in verbalizing their concerns.

### **Exercise**

Let's face it, the last thing a nurse on the verge of burnout and at the end of a 12-hour shift wants to do is exercise (although kudos to those who do). However, exercise has been proven as an effective stress reducer. Exercise helps reduce adrenaline and cortisol as well as boost endorphins. It also helps boost energy, so nurses aren't so exhausted at the end of their shift.

### **Editor's Note:**

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*In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:*

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The question of when and how much can be answered easily. Whenever a nurse *can* exercise and however *much* they are able to is better than nothing. Counting running around at work as exercise is probably not sufficient. The bottom line is you must exercise to keep your immune system healthy.

### **Find a Hobby**

Finding a hobby is another great way to reduce stress. It gives nurses something else to focus on, and it's something that they enjoy. Hobbies make people feel good and sometimes provide a feeling of pride and accomplishment. Hobbies don't need to be time-consuming; it could include reading, knitting, working on an art project, even exercise (which is a double-whammy when it comes to stress reduction). The possibilities for hobbies are endless and have enormous health benefits as well.

### **Breathe Deeply**

Many people eschew the notion that deep breathing helps to reduce stress. Nurses, especially, should take notice, as there is a scientific basis on this method of stress relief. According to [stress.org](http://stress.org), deep breathing helps to bring oxygen to the brain and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps to reduce stress. Deep breathing is a quick and easy way to reduce stress; it can even be done at work in the midst of chaos.

### **Seek Help**

For some, the stress is too much to handle independently using the techniques listed above (and more). Nurses need to know that it's okay to seek professional help when necessary. When stressors at work become unbearable to the point that it manifests into physical symptoms, if interpersonal relationships are strained, or if work performance suffers and patient safety is at risk, nurses should seek professional help immediately. Many organizations offer some type of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for staff, but there are also resources out in the community.

### **Other Suggestions**

- Simplify meal times: Set up breakfast and lunch the evening before.
- Listen to a different station: Turn off the news and listen to peppy uplifting music.
- Stop multi-tasking, unless you're Bill Gates: Multi-tasking is stressful and unproductive. Concentrate on one thing at a time.
- Get earthy: Connect with Mother Nature
- Play: As adults we just don't play enough. Play was invented to kill stress.
- Go on a social media diet: Get off Facebook and other social media if all you do is compare yourself negatively to others.

"Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look once in a while, you could miss it." Ferris Bueller

Reference: [www.PostivelyHappy.Me](http://www.PostivelyHappy.Me)  
[www.registerednursing.org/](http://www.registerednursing.org/)

