

# Breaking the Cycle of Stress and Depression

Dealing with your stress in a constructive way can be an important part of overcoming your depression. Of course, not all stress is bad. A small amount of stress is actually good for you, keeping you alert and motivated. But sustained stress will elevate stress biochemicals such as cortisol which can take a toll on your mood and your body. Over time, cortisol can also weaken your immune system and even affect your memory.

Sustained stress also interferes with “happiness biochemicals” such as serotonin and dopamine. These are biochemicals produced in the brain and body which translate into feelings of calm, happiness, and well-being. They are the same biochemicals that are affected when you take anti-depressant medication.

The connection between stress and depression is complex and circular. Besides the direct impact on your body and mood, excess stress can lead to poor habits like drinking and overeating which will then exacerbate your feelings of depression.

Fortunately, you have it in your power to break the cycle of stress and depression. Researchers tell us that specific activities can reduce the harmful biochemicals associated with prolonged stress and elevate the biochemicals associated with feelings of satisfaction and well-being.

The worksheet on the next page shows you things you can do every day to fight the negative impact of stress on your depression. When you make these activities daily habits, they will not only help you overcome your depression but will also help prevent physical problems.

Put a check mark by the activities you are most likely to do. See if you can find one activity to do in each category. Then estimate the time you will do the activities each day. Finally, put a check mark when you have accomplished this activity each day in a week. Keep this chart for three weeks.

Week of \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

Activity	Check If Interested	Estimated Time/Day	Achieved (put a check mark for each day)
<b>Scheduled Relaxation</b>			
Deep breathing			
Meditation			
Visualization			
Relax with quiet music			
Yoga			
Other			
<b>Self-Care</b>			
7-9 hours sleep			
Good nutrition			
Minimum ½ hour exercise			
Massage			
Other			
<b>Social Activities</b>			
Meaningful conversation(s)			
Fun activities with family or friends			
Meals with family or friends			
Spiritual activities with others			
Other			
<b>Time Management</b>			
Set goals and steps to achieve them			
Realistic 'to do' list			
Delegating appropriate responsibilities			
Realistic scheduling and planning			
Other			
<b>Creative and Fun Activities</b>			
Journaling			
Hobbies			
Time with pets			
Play			
Other			

List other things you can do reduce stress in your life:

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