



Stress-Free Me! Challenge

Participant Guide



Welcome to the Stress-Free Me! Challenge

This six-week program will help you figure out what's stressing you — and learn how to deal with it. Each week you'll focus on a different stress-relieving technique, tracking it daily, along with your stress level.

Week 1 Recognizing and Rating Your Daily Stress

Week 2 Stress-Free Focus: Fitness

Week 3 Stress-Free Focus: Social Harmony

Week 4 Stress-Free Focus: Relaxation

Week 5 Stress-Free Focus: Clarity

Week 6 Stress-Free Focus: Your Choice

When you've finished, you'll have the tools you need to manage your stress and enjoy life more!

Sorting out Stressors

Imagine a life free from stress. Does it sound inviting? The fact is that stress is the force behind our productivity. Without some stress we lack motivation and the desire to do much at all.

However, too much stress can disable our thinking and abilities. The perfect level of stress for an individual to function varies from person to person. Striking that balance between too much and too little stress is the key to enjoying life.

Not all stressors produce distress or negative stress. Planning a wedding or competing in a sport can be a stressor, but in a good way. This is called eustress or positive stress. Despite activating the stress response, this type of activity is enjoyable.

Here are some of the most commonly reported everyday stressors. Do you know yours?

Health	Not feeling well or dealing with a chronic health condition
Hassles	Traffic jams, detours, flat tires, long lines at the store
Relationships	Disagreements with a spouse, parent, child, friend, or coworker
Financial	Having debt or not being able to make ends quite meet
Environment	Pollution, violence, and worry over personal safety
Life Changes	Divorce, relocation, changing jobs, disability, or death
Occupational	Deadlines, office politics, high workload, sales goals
Obligations/Daily Responsibilities	Carpool, pets, meal preparation, care-giving
Technology	24/7 connection, upgrades, outages

Stress and Disease: Related?

Did you know that 75-90 percent of all doctor office visits are believed to be stress-related? And it's no wonder, given the fast pace and chaos of our society today.

Most of us face a fair number of stressors on any given day. Traffic delays, work deadlines, daily tasks like grocery shopping and carpools, as well as minor conflicts with others can set off the stress response. Soon heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure elevate. Your palms may even feel sweaty. This is to prepare you to either fight the stressor or flee from the situation.

Repeatedly being bombarded with minor stressors throughout the day may also result in chronic stress. And that is cause for concern, given that the association between chronic stress and disease is 85%.

Why the body develops chronic disease in the face of long-term exposure to stress is still not well understood. However, experts believe that the constant stream of stress related hormones in the body may play a role.

Finding ways to avoid stressors may be one way to keep your body from reacting to chronic stress — but it is often not a realistic plan. Learning to change your response to stressful events may work better and lower your risk for stress-related disease.

Type “stress management” into your favorite search engine — and start developing lifelong stress-fighting habits today. It will help ensure a lifetime of good health and well being.

Stress-Related Diseases/Conditions

- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Digestive problems
- Depression
- Obesity
- Memory problems
- Worsening skin conditions

Stressed Out!

There are usually warning signs when stress overload is near. Do you know what signs and symptoms to look for?

Being aware of these signs and symptoms will help you identify the stressors in your life. Once you recognize the everyday situations that trigger the stress response, make a choice to change the situation or change your response to it. Either way, the goal is to prevent the symptoms listed below, and to protect you from long-term effects of on-going stress overload.

You might be reaching your limit of stress if you have one or more of these common stress-overload symptoms:

- Unexplained aches and pains
- Diarrhea and constipation
- Heartburn
- Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting
- Frequent colds
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Restless sleeping
- Feeling irritable
- Moodiness
- Easily agitated
- Feeling depressed
- Inability to focus and concentrate
- Memory problems
- Feeling anxious
- Frequent worrying
- Poor judgment
- Negative attitude
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Procrastination
- Loss of appetite or over-eating
- Relying on alcohol, nicotine, or drugs to relax
- Neglecting responsibilities
- Withdrawing from social situations
- Fatigue

On the next page, you'll find a form to help you pinpoint your stressors and rate your stress level during the first week of the Challenge. Then, each week you'll read about a different strategy for dealing with stress and use a Tracking Form to note your strategies and your stress level that week.

The first step toward managing your stress is finding out where it's coming from. Simple, right? Maybe — but it may take more effort than you think to find the real sources of stress.

During the first week of the Stress-Free Me! Challenge, note 1-3 sources of stress each day. Then rate your level of stress on a scale of 1 (little stress) to 5 (intense stress). This will give you a clearer picture of your current stressors and stress level. After Week 1, you'll move on to the Tracking Form for Weeks 2 through 6.

Sample Entry:

Stressor		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1	bills, sick child, disagreement with spouse					X

Week 1: Recognize & Rate

Stressor		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						

Maintaining a healthy and strong body is a proven way to help you cope with everyday stress.

- A healthy heart is much better at dealing with the physical side of stress than a not-so-healthy heart.
- Stress taxes and weakens the immune system. Keeping your immune system healthy helps fight the ill effects of extra stress.
- Blood pressure rises as stress levels increase. Keep your blood pressure out of the danger zone by managing stress.

Be physically active. It doesn't matter what you choose to do. Walking, biking, bowling, golfing, swimming, or hiking. All forms of physical activity counteract the effects of stress.

Stretch

Flexibility exercises stretch tight and stiff muscles and release tension.

Sleep

Aim for 7-8 hours of restful sleep each night. A good night's sleep recharges the body and brain and strengthens the immune system.

Cut back on caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant that increases your heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure. It can also make you jittery, edgy and irritable, as well as disturb your sleep!

Stick to whole foods

Stay away from fast food and vending machines. Eat more fruits, veggies and whole grains for steady blood sugar. This will also help your immune system run better.

Hydrate

Fluids flush out toxins. Try to drink 9-11 cups daily. Water is the best choice, but 100% fruit juices and flavored water count toward your total.

Watch the sugar

Sugar can provide a boost of energy, but it's often followed by a crash. Eat healthy snacks containing complex carbohydrates and protein for longer-lasting energy.

Enjoy leisure time

Enjoyable activities balance the stress of jobs, relationships or families. A hobby like bowling, crafts or a book club helps you slow down and takes your mind off the stressors.

Don't forget humor

A good laugh actually massages your internal organs. It also releases feel-good endorphins (chemicals in the body) to counteract the ill effects of stress.

Stress-Free Strategies

Be sure to record which strategy from the Fitness category you used each day on your Tracking Form. You can use a strategy listed below, or one of your own.

- Take a 20-minute walk outside or in a shopping mall or grocery store.
- Choose a healthy snack like whole grain crackers with cheese, low-fat yogurt, a handful of grapes and almonds, peanut butter with whole grain bread, air-popped popcorn, or a glass of low fat milk with carrots.
- Fill up a water bottle and sip on it throughout the day.
- Cut your caffeine intake back by reducing the number of servings of caffeinated beverages.
- Take three mini stretch breaks throughout the day.
- Bicycle around the neighborhood or indoors on a stationary bike.
- Allow yourself seven hours to sleep. You may not sleep the entire time but at least you have given yourself permission to try.
- Participate in a favorite leisure-time activity like reading, knitting, gardening, photography, a card game, or woodworking.
- Attend a group fitness class like kick boxing, spinning, step aerobics, Pilates, or water exercise.
- Shoot baskets for 20 minutes.
- Enjoy a funny movie, television show, or home movie.
- Do any form of physical activity for 20 minutes. How about water walking, roller blading, golfing, swimming, or lifting weights?
- Share a joke, cartoon, or funny moment with someone.

Stress-Free Focus: Fitness

Your Name	Department
Email	Phone

Strategy		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						

Forming strong and meaningful connections with others has a positive impact on psychological as well as physical health. Learn to lean on those closest to you. They may help you put things in perspective or simply listen to you express your thoughts and feelings. Your social support network can help absorb the blow of a bad day and help you pick yourself back up. Take time this week to nurture these important connections.

Stress-Free Strategies

Be sure to record which strategy from the Social Harmony category you used each day on your Tracking Form. You can use a strategy listed below, or one of your own.

- Strengthen connections. Call or visit a friend. Be fully present during the conversation and focus on listening to the other person.
- Express gratitude. Do something nice for someone who has helped you out recently. Consider a handwritten thank-you note, flowers, or a simple cup of tea.
- Give of yourself. Volunteer for a cause that is important to you. You will meet like-minded people and may make a new friend. Remember, the idea is not to add more stressors to your life, so keep it simple and don't over-commit.
- Take stock. Take inventory of your social support network. Jot down a list of people that you can count on to weather the storm with you if needed. How does it look? Think about what you might need to do to create the best possible social support network for you.
- Seek out connections. Look for opportunities to make new friends, whether it be at your local fitness center, church, art class, civic group or online social networking.
- Give and you shall receive. Reach out to someone you know is going through a rough time. Send them a quick note to let them know you are thinking of them or pick up the phone and lend an ear. Whatever you are able to give is likely to come back to you tenfold when you most need it.
- Seek positive energy. Time is precious. Spend yours with people who fill your glass, rather than empty it. Seek out people who radiate positive energy instead of those who drain you of energy.

Stress-Free Focus: Social Harmony

Your Name	Department
Email	Phone

Strategy		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						

Relaxation activities can help reduce stress symptoms in a variety of ways:

- Drawing the focus inward and clearing the mind of outside distractions is a central theme of most relaxation techniques. Taking a break can give you new clarity and the ability to concentrate fully.
- Calming activities like yoga and meditation lower the heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate.
- Muscle tension, chronic pain and anger often melt away while relaxing quietly.

Stress-Free Strategies

Be sure to record which strategy from the Relaxation category you used each day on your Tracking Form. You can use a strategy listed below, or one of your own.

- **Yoga:** Try a class at your fitness center, check out a DVD from the library or check local television listings for yoga classes.

- **Massage:** Once seen as a luxury, massage is a necessity for those with tight, sore and tense muscles. Enjoy the sense of calm and comfort that come with a soothing massage from a licensed massage therapist.

- **Meditation:** Simply sitting in a quiet room focusing on your breathing or closing your eyes and repeating a word phrase trains your brain to relax and let go of worry. Sessions may be as short as 5 minutes or as long as an hour. Try to do one or two sessions each day.

- **Progressive relaxation:** This can be done anywhere at any time. It involves tensing and then relaxing the major muscles one at a time. Tense each muscle for five seconds and then relax slowly for 30 seconds. Think about how different it feels to be tense versus relaxed. Try to do it three or four times daily.

- **Deep breathing:** Close your eyes and breathe in, allowing the air to flow in through your nose. Then release the breath through the mouth. Repeat slowly four to five times.

- **Visualization:** Find a quiet place, close your eyes and let your mind wander to a calm and soothing place like a beach or a forest. Use all of your senses, imagining how the sand feels, how the air smells and what the waves sound like. Spend five to ten minutes there.

- **Tai Chi:** This ancient form of moving meditation uses gentle flowing movements combined with deep breathing. It calms the mind, and when practiced regularly, creates a sense of calm and peacefulness. Try a class or DVD.

- **Nature:** Spend time in nature to reconnect with the rhythm of the natural world. Visit a local park, take a hike, camp under the stars or visit a botanical center.

- **Music/Art:** Listening to peaceful music or drawing can also be a good way to relax. 10-30 minutes daily of one of these activities can quiet the mind and leave you feeling refreshed.

Stress-Free Focus: Relaxation

Your Name	Department
Email	Phone

Strategy		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						

An endless to-do list can be the source of stress for many. Having a clear vision of what you want for yourself is important. It will help you decide which tasks are worthy of your immediate time and energy, which can be completed later, and which do not belong on your list. Whether it's setting boundaries, establishing priorities, or managing your time, let clarity be your guide.

Try these techniques to better define your priorities and boundaries:

Keep track of time. Record your activities and the time you spent on them for one day. This will help identify how you are budgeting your time. Then pinpoint those activities that do not move you toward finishing high-priority tasks but do take up a chunk of your time. Drop these from your day or spend less time on them.

Prioritize the to-do list. If you have a to-do list, rank the items in order of importance. If you don't have a task list already, write down the top 2-4 tasks that you would like to complete in the coming days. Rank the tasks by importance. Identifying high-priority to-do items helps you direct your time, effort, and resources to the more important tasks.

Learn to say no. If what you really want is a relaxed evening at home reading a good book, then why accept an invitation to go out for dinner? Try politely declining invitations that don't fall into line with what you really want for yourself right now.

Clarify expectations. Much time and frustration can be spent trying to figure out what someone else expects from you. How in-depth does that assigned report need to be? Clarify time requirements on the front end.

Establish boundaries. How much overtime are you willing to work? How many children's after-school activities are you willing to juggle? It's not easy to establish boundaries, but it's necessary to ensure a healthy balance in life. Be sure to verbalize these boundaries to others so they can support you in setting and keeping them.

Stress-Free Strategies

Be sure to record which strategy from the Clarity category you used each day on your Tracking Form. You can use a strategy listed below, or one of your own.

- Rank each item on your to-do list and drop the tasks that are not important to you.
- Record your activities for a full day and think about where you are spending time on activities that are not a priority.
- Make an effort to minimize the amount of time spent on activities that do not move you closer to completing high priority tasks. Think social networking, online shopping, internet surfing, watching television, or playing video games.
- Zoom in and look at the week ahead. Have you made commitments or obligations that will not help you achieve the balance you want? If so, decide if you will go through with them or graciously step away. Then move forward with this plan.
- Identify the boundaries that you need at work in order to maintain a good life balance and minimize unnecessary stressors.
- Begin the day by imagining what you would like the day to look like. What activities are included? How long will it take to complete each activity? Who will support you in these efforts? How do you want to feel?
- Write a personal mission statement. The internet is a great resource and provides many examples and ideas.
- A balanced schedule may include a mix of work, family, social activities, solitary pursuits, daily responsibilities, as well as downtime. Think about whether or not your typical schedule honors all of your needs and is balanced. If not, think of a change you can make tomorrow to create a better balance for yourself.

Stress-Free Focus: Clarity

Your Name	Department
Email	Phone

Strategy		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						

Stress-Free Focus: Your Choice

Your Name	Department
Email	Phone

Strategy		Least Stress ◀ Rating ▶ Most Stress				
		1	2	3	4	5
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						

Now that you've completed the Stress-Free Me! Challenge, you've learned some strategies to help manage stress in your life! Be sure to return your Tracking Forms to your challenge coordinator for a chance to win a fabulous prize!

1. Review Materials

We have provided you with all the materials needed to implement a meaningful wellness incentive challenge. Now is the time to review and become familiar with the materials:

- ▶ Introductory letter
- ▶ Promotional materials
 - Paycheck inserts
 - Table tents
 - Break room poster
- ▶ Newsletter articles (3)
- ▶ Motivational messages (6)
- ▶ Sign-up form
- ▶ Participant packet
- ▶ Program evaluation
- ▶ FAQs

2. Establish Timeline

Now that you have reviewed materials, it's time to start planning when you will implement the program. Take into account the time it takes to reproduce the items you reviewed in Step 1. Without appropriate promotion, you cannot expect to engage participants in the wellness challenge.

3. Customize Materials

All materials provided with this incentive campaign are yours. If you would like to modify them with your logo or other information, now is the time to do that.

4. Promote, Promote, Promote

Publish articles in your internal newsletter, send the introductory letter and/or email, get registration materials to potential participants and put up promotional flyers.

5. Launch!

It is now 'go' time! Launch the program with great fanfare to motivate participants to make meaningful behavior changes. Be sure to continue to communicate throughout the program with the included motivational messages, activity ideas and regular information in your internal newsletter.

6. Reward and Recognize

To reinforce participants' new healthful habits, be sure to reward and recognize those who meet their goals!

7. Gather Feedback

Use the included evaluation sheet to determine how well the program was received and how you can build on your success. Don't forget to share the findings with senior leadership!

Q. WHO is the campaign designed for?

This challenge is designed for both those thinking about making meaningful lifestyle changes and those who are already practicing healthful habits. The emphasis of this campaign is on identifying working strategies for managing daily stressors.

Q. WHAT is the campaign goal?

The goal of every wellness challenge is to give you the tools to make meaningful and healthful lifestyle changes. This challenge focuses on giving you a variety of strategies to manage daily stress. You will work on strategies in a different category each week, and rate your stress to find out what works best for you.

Q. WHEN and WHERE do I need to complete activities?

Daily stress is all around us, so can test your stress-fighting strategies just about anywhere.

Q. WHY is it important that I participate?

By tuning in to daily stress and finding good ways to manage it, we can more fully enjoy life. Once we identify strategies that work for us, we are well on our way to thriving instead of simply existing.

Q. HOW will my progress be tracked?

During the first week of the challenge, you will simply rate your level of stress each day. You will also record three areas of your life that are causing you stress. During weeks 2 through 6, you will record which methods you used daily, while you keep recording your stress level. At the end of the program, return your tracking form to the coordinator.



Learn to Manage Your Stress with the Stress-Free Me! Challenge

*Learn what's causing your stress so you can better appreciate life.
Find the strategies that work best for you.*

▶ **Fitness:**

You need a strong and healthy body to withstand the physical responses to stress.

▶ **Relaxation**

Learn to calm and quiet the body, mind, and spirit to renew energy levels and refresh the mind.

▶ **Clarity**

Get clear on your priorities. Make sure your to-do list is true to your values and beliefs.

▶ **Social Support**

Lean on friends to help cushion the fall of a stressful day.

Sign Up Today!

QualChoice[®]
HEALTH INSURANCE



Sign up today!

For more information: _____

Learn what's causing your stress so you can better appreciate life.
Find the strategies that work best for you.

Learn to Manage Your Stress

Stress-Free Me! Challenge

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Find the strategies that work best for you.

For more information: _____

Sign up today!



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Learn to Manage Your Stress

Learn what's causing your stress so you can better appreciate life. Find the strategies that work best for you.

For more information: _____

Sign up today!



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Stress-Free Me! Challenge

Learn to Manage Your Stress

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For more information: _____

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Stress-Free Me! Challenge

Learn to Manage Your Stress

Learn what's causing your stress so you can better appreciate life. Find the strategies that work best for you.

For more information: _____

Sign up today!



1403 MK 013_01 06/2017

*By learning what is causing us stress, we can better appreciate life.
Our wellness challenge will help you find the strategies that work best for you!*

▶ **Fitness**

You need a strong and healthy body to withstand the physical responses to stress.

▶ **Relaxation**

Learn to calm and quiet the body, mind, and spirit to renew energy levels and refresh the mind.

▶ **Clarity**

Get clear on your priorities. Make sure your to-do list is true to your values and beliefs.

▶ **Social Support**

Lean on friends to help cushion the fall of a stressful day.

Sign up for the Stress-Free Me! Challenge today and start taking charge of the stress in your life.

Registration Deadline: _____

Return Completed Form to: _____

Stress-Free Me! Challenge Registration

Your Name	Department
Email	Phone

Please answer the questions below to help us understand how you felt about the program.

1. Did you successfully complete all 6 weeks of the Stress-Free Me! Challenge? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

2. Was the challenge easy to understand? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

3. I found the Stress-Free Me! Challenge to be (circle one):
 - a. Not challenging enough for me.
 - b. The right level of challenge for me.
 - c. Too challenging for me.

4. If the challenge was offered again would you recommend it to a coworker? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

5. Are you more aware of your stress management strategies now than you were before taking part in the Stress-Free Me! Challenge? (circle one) **Yes** **No**

6. I received these benefits from the Stress-Free Me! Challenge (circle all that apply)
 - a. It was fun for me.
 - b. I learned new things about how to live a healthy lifestyle.
 - c. I'm thinking more about changing one or more of my health habits.
 - d. I am continuing to use a stress management strategy that I began during the challenge.
 - e. It reinforced that my health habits are good and I should continue them.
 - f. I enjoyed participating with coworkers.
 - g. Other (please specify): _____

7. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the Stress-Free Me! Challenge (circle one)
Very satisfied **Somewhat satisfied** **Somewhat dissatisfied** **Very dissatisfied**

8. What did you like most about the Stress-Free Me! Challenge?

9. What did you like least about the Healthy Stress-Free Me! Challenge?

10. Please share any ideas and suggestions you have for future programs.

Please return to: _____

Name (optional) _____ **Dept (optional):** _____