

YOUR
FOUR STEPS
FOR
*Reducing
Stress*



SecurityHealth Plan.

Promises kept, plain and simple.

Introduction

Stress is a natural part of life, but it doesn't have to make life overly difficult. If you know how to cope, you'll be more confident, and you'll sleep better, feel better and live a longer, healthier life.

If you've found your way here, you're probably thinking about trying to reduce your stress. We're glad you've made it this far. We want you to be healthy, and reducing stress is one of the best things you can do to maintain or even improve your health.

You might have tried to relieve your stress in the past without lasting results. Perhaps the stress led you to unhealthful habits such as smoking, drinking, overeating or excessive worrying. Allowing stress to accumulate, or using certain behaviors to cope, leads to more wear and tear on the body—both physically and mentally. Instead, allow us to support you in creating strategies to effectively reduce and manage your stress. We can help you live a better, healthier life.

Continue reading for more information on how you can tackle the stages of reducing stress **one step at a time**.

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Step 1

“I *Might* Try to Reduce My Stress”

Are you thinking about trying to reduce your stress? That’s great! It might not seem like an easy thing to do because we all have stress regardless of where we go or what we do. But think about how a decision to try to cut stress might benefit you.

Why is cutting stress important to me?

Relaxation techniques can help you reduce stress, limit your anger and frustration, increase your energy and concentration, raise your resistance to illness, and reinforce your optimism. These techniques also can improve your health by cutting your muscle tension, chronic pain and headaches; lowering your blood pressure; increasing your blood flow; and slowing our heart and breathing rates.

Your reasons are most important

We can tell you about the many advantages of cutting back on stress. In the end, your reasons will be the ones that inspire you the most and your own motivation is vital to your success.



**Step
1**

“I Might Try to Reduce My Stress”

Which of these stress-relief benefits would you like to achieve? Check all that apply to you.

- Limit anger and frustration
 - Reduce anxiety
 - Increase your energy and concentration
 - Raise your resistance to illness
 - Reinforce your optimism
 - Cutting muscle tension, chronic pain and headaches
 - Lowering your blood pressure
 - Slowing your heart and breathing rates
 - Other _____
-

***What might get in the way of your goals to cut stress?
(Examples: Your job, family life, personal responsibilities)***

***What can you do to help you overcome these obstacles?
(Examples: Talk to your boss about your workload, take a vacation, try relaxation techniques)***

Envision your rewards

Picture what success could be for you. Imagine it.

Picture yourself: How will you feel when you begin to cut stress? You can learn to delegate chores and tasks at home and at work, leaving more time for yourself. You will be more productive at work and in your personal life.

More energy: Imagine falling asleep faster and feeling more rested in the morning. If you learn to more effectively handle your time, you can stay calm and more focused.

Imagine your new lifestyle: Think about how you can learn to let go of unnecessary commitments. What will it be like to see more time for yourself on your calendar? You can let go of the idea that you need to please everyone or be perfect in what you achieve.





“I *Might* Try to Reduce My Stress”

More help is available

We hope that this helps you see how targeting stress could help your life. If you decide that reducing stress is important to you, we invite you to continue with the next step. We encourage you to call your health care provider if you are unable to maintain your daily activities, or if you have persistent feelings of depression, guilt or hopelessness. There often are other options for help with stress including programs through schools, churches and local agencies.

Should you need extra help, we’re just a few clicks away. Sign up for **Relax**, a digital health-coaching program, which teaches stress-coping skills. Simply register for Security Health Online by clicking on **My Account** at the top right of the home page and clicking on **Register**. Then log in with your user name and password. Advice is available to members 24 hours a day. If you need help registering, call Customer Service at **1-800-472-2363** from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and ask to speak with a health coach.



Online resources

Here are some more places to go if you need more information on reducing stress.

National Institute of Mental Health – www.nimh.nih.gov

WebMD – www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management

American Heart Association – www.heart.org/stress



Step 2

“I’m Ready to Reduce My Stress”

Congratulations on deciding that managing stress is important to you. Have you thought about what small steps you could take now to help you prepare to cut stress and deal with it as it arises? Seeking advice from health care experts and others who can help might ease your transition toward a healthier lifestyle.

Get Started

How do you plan to start? Let us guide you through it. Take the time now to:

- 1. Decide when you’ll start:** Schedule a day soon, preferably within a month, so you still will be excited to make an effort to cut stress.

My start date is: _____

I picked this date because: _____

- 2. Get the support you deserve.** Create a list of people who you will tell that you’re trying to reduce stress. Tell them what you want to do and ask for their support. The people who are most important to you often will be your best sources of support.

People who might provide support: _____

Step 2

“I’m Ready to Reduce My Stress”

- 3. Talk to your health care provider.** It is important to discuss your goals with your health care provider, especially as your goals relate to health conditions that might be affected by lifestyle changes such as reducing stress.
- 4. Track your stress.** Write down what causes your stress on a daily basis throughout the week. Was it something subtle? It might have been several events that built up throughout your day until you noticed your response. Or was it something more immediate? Maybe traffic caused you to be late for work today. Regardless, take a few deep breaths and keep a log like the one below. Then, at the end of the week, see what was most likely to cause your stress and think about how you can approach a similar situation the next time.

<i>Day</i>	<i>Trigger(s)</i>	<i>Emotions</i>

When this week did you feel the most stress and why? _____

Was there a time of day that was most stressful for you? _____

What can you do when you encounter similar stressful issues?

How you felt physically

What you did to feel better

Step 2

“I’m Ready to Reduce My Stress”

Plan to take action

Here are some more things you can expect to do to help you relieve stress.

Eat right. Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains to give you more energy. Your body digests healthful foods more slowly than unhealthy foods. That slower process helps your brain release serotonin, allowing your body to feel better. Try complex carbohydrates such as whole-grain cereals, breads, pastas and oatmeal. Fruits that contain vitamin C, such as oranges, help reduce your stress hormones and strengthen your immune system.

Exercise. It’s no secret that exercise has immediate health benefits, but it also helps reduce stress. Exercise raises your brain’s endorphin levels to help you feel better. This process is sometimes called “a runner’s high,” but you don’t always have to run to get it. Simply do what you can to exercise. Health experts recommend that people get 30 to 60 minutes of activity each day in these areas:

- Aerobic exercise: Brisk walking, biking and swimming
- Strength exercise: Push-ups, sit-ups and lifting weights
- Flexibility exercise: Stretching or yoga

If you can’t spare 30 to 60 minutes a day, it’s just as beneficial to be physically active for 10 minutes three times a day. Physical activity is one of the best ways to relieve stress. It will also help:

- Control your appetite
- Keep your heart healthy
- Manage or prevent high blood pressure
- Counteract anxiety and depression
- Improve your mood
- Increase your muscle tone
- Give you more energy

It’s just as
beneficial to be
physically active
for 10 minutes
three times a day
as it is to be active
for 30 minutes
once a day.

If you're not sure where to start, do something simple such as walking. It costs nothing to get started, and according to the American Heart Association's website (heart.org), walking for as little as 30 minutes a day provides heart-health benefits.

Allow for "me time." Build relaxation into your daily schedule. Even if it's just a few minutes to stretch, make sure to take some time off from your responsibilities.

Laugh whenever you can. Like exercise, laughter releases endorphins that can help you maintain a positive attitude. If you need a reason to laugh, rent a funny movie, watch a funny show or read a funny book.

Connect with friends and family. Develop a strong support system against stress by spending time with the people who make your life better.

Do something you enjoy. Make time for leisure activities. It doesn't matter if you play a musical instrument, work on your car or read a book. Make sure you take time for something enjoyable each day.

Turn off the news and your electronic devices. You might try not to watch the news or read the newspaper for a while to avoid hearing about things that make you angrier, such as politics. But also try turning off your cell phone, radio or laptop computer. Give yourself permission to let your cell phone calls go to voice mail. Reduce the stressors you have in your life and you can reduce your stress.

Reduce caffeine. Caffeine is a drug that stimulates your body's nervous system. In small amounts, it might perk you up or make you feel more alert. But that lift often is followed by a crash that depresses your mood and energy, causing you more stress.

Limit alcohol and avoid cigarettes. Alcohol and cigarettes might provide what seems like an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid the issue at hand. Instead, confront your problems with a clear and open mind.

Get plenty of sleep. Sleep energizes your mind and body. Fatigue often causes us not to think clearly, contributing to stress.



Step 2

“I’m Ready to Reduce My Stress”

Learn to manage stress

Stress is a normal part of life. It will never completely go away. So how can you deal with it? Learn to recognize the warning signs. Check all of the warning signs you might encounter when something triggers your stress. Then, develop plans for how you can deal with stressful situations.

These situations are stressful for me:

- I dislike shopping in a crowded grocery store.
- I dislike sitting and waiting at the doctor’s office.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

My solutions:

- Shop at times when not many others are out.
- I will bring something to do while I wait.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Be SMART: Give yourself goals that provide direction and motivation by staying SMART.

Specific: Make sure your goal leaves no room for interpretation. Keep it precise and write down an exact guide for what you want to do.

Measurable: Include benchmarks and time periods that will help define success.

Achievable: Make sure your goal is attainable.

Relevant: It's good to have support from family and friends, but your goal should matter to you at least as much as anyone else.

Timed: Change requires a commitment. Designate a clear timeframe for you to achieve your goal.

Here's an example of a SMART goal:

"Beginning Monday, I will try exercising for at least 30 minutes at least twice a week."

"Beginning Tuesday, I will drink decaffeinated coffee at least three times a week."



What SMART goals can you set for yourself?

Think about what you can achieve over the next week to help you reduce stress. Once you achieve your goals, continue creating SMART goals until your goals become habit.

Step 2

“I’m Ready to Reduce My Stress”

You’re one step closer

Congratulations again on coming this far. You’re about to give yourself the gift of a healthier, less stressful lifestyle. We look forward to helping you take your next steps. Remember to seek out information from reliable resources in magazines, books and on the Internet to help guide you along the way.



Remember, if you need extra help, we’re just a few clicks away. Sign up for ***Relax,*** a digital health coaching program, which teaches stress-coping skills. Simply register for the **Security Health Online** member portal by clicking ***My Account*** at the top right of the homepage at securityhealth.org, then ***Register.*** When you have it, log in with your username and password. Advice is available to members 24 hours a day.

If you need help registering, call Customer Service at **1-800-472-2363** between 7 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and ask to speak with a health coach.

Step 3

“I’m Reducing My Stress”

You’ve started to achieve a healthier lifestyle by reducing your stress. Be proud! You’ll improve your confidence and energy with every accomplishment. As you continue, keep using this guide as a helpful tool. Keep it where you can find it. Remember to maintain helpful relationships with your doctor, family and friends along the way, and follow the plans you’ve set for yourself.

Build new habits

As you strive to achieve regular habits that reduce your stress, keep these points in mind:

It’s hard to break old habits. Practice your new healthful habits to make them routine. It will take time for them to replace your old habits.

You deserve friends. You might find it easier to reduce stress when you have support from at least one friend or family member. Talk with them about how they can support you.

My support person/people is/are _____

Don’t worry about setbacks. If you don’t meet your goals or you feel like you’ve lost control of your stress level for a day, you haven’t failed. Remember to focus on your long-term goals. Make note of any mistakes, learn from them and move on.

Step 3

“I’m Reducing My Stress”

Learn more. Keep your mind on track by reading websites, magazines, books and more that feature professionals who can help you. Learn all you can about reducing stress and changing old habits.

Find what works for you

As you track your stress, identify what you can do to lessen it or avoid it. Can you change the situation? Should you adapt to it? Here are some ideas:

Set limits. Imagine yourself busy at work. You’re so busy that you don’t know how you’ll get all your work done. And then, your boss visits your desk to say, “I have a project for you. Can you get this done by Friday?” You don’t want to disappoint your boss. So, without thinking, you might say, “Sure I can do that.” This is a sure way to pile on more stress. In your work and your personal life, learn to respectfully say “no.” Negotiate the amount of work you face or the time you have to finish the job.

Control what you see and hear. If news of the latest school shooting or terrorist attack frustrates you, turn off the TV. If conversations about politics or religion anger you, excuse yourself as these conversations arise. If Christmas shopping crowds make you anxious, shop online. Do whatever you can to prevent yourself from experiencing unnecessary stress.



Talk about your problems. If a stressful situation arises, share your experience with someone who will listen. If a particular person causes you stress, respectfully discuss the issue at hand and why it's a problem. Keeping your stress to yourself often causes your stress to build and problems to grow.

Find a different perspective. Ask yourself how distressing the situation you face will be in a week or a month. If it doesn't stand to be a problem for long, it probably isn't worth your negative emotions. Focus instead on the things you can appreciate in your life. Don't let yourself concentrate for long on the negative situation.

Accept what you can't change. We have no control of many of the situations we face. If you can't change the situation that's causing you stress, focus on how you can react to it. Do you choose to get angry about it or do you concentrate on what you can do to improve the situation?

Which of these techniques would you like to try? _____

What might get in the way of your goals? _____

What can you plan to do to help you avoid these obstacles? _____

Step 3

"I'm Reducing My Stress"

Find a physical method

Instead of just trying to adjust or adapt to stress, you might want to find a way to allow your body to **relax**. You can try any number of relaxation techniques, but find exactly what works for you. Here are a few suggestions.



Breathe deeply. Rapid, shallow breathing is a typical response to stress. But deep breathing is relaxing and helps your heart, brain, digestion and immune system. When you feel stress, sit in a relaxed position and inhale deeply through your nose. Hold your breath for four or five seconds. Then, exhale through your mouth for several seconds. Repeat this up to 10 times. This takes practice, but it will help your muscles relax as you take in more oxygen.

Try visualization. Simply speaking, visualization means finding your "happy place." Close your eyes when you're in a quiet spot. Then, take a calm, visual, peaceful journey in your mind to a relaxing place or situation. Use as many senses as you can. For example, if you would imagine going to a Brewers baseball game, try to hear the crowd and the crack of a bat. Smell the food cooking at the tailgate parties. Feel the laces on the foul ball you just caught during the warm summer day. Imagine seeing your favorite player trot around the bases after a game-winning home run.

Meditate. Meditation isn't about bending your body into an uncomfortable, cross-legged position while you chant and burn incense. Instead, it commonly involves focusing your attention away from stressful issues and toward your breathing, a specific object or a positive thought. It's easiest for beginners in a quiet setting, but it can be done anytime you need stress relief. There's no right or wrong way to do it. You can do it with your eyes open or closed, when you're alone or in a crowd, or in a light or dark room. All you need is a few minutes and a technique that works for you.

Try yoga. Yoga involves several postures and breathing exercises that promote your flexibility and clear your mind. Yoga requires balance and concentration that help you live in the moment and forget about your stress.

Which of these techniques would you like to try? _____

What might get in the way of your goals? _____

What can you do to help you avoid these obstacles? _____

You're one step closer again

The longer you stick with your stress-reduction efforts, the greater your chance of long-term success. And you've already come quite far. Think about how your health and quality of life already have changed for the better. We now encourage you to take the long-term steps that will enforce your healthier habits for life. Also, remember that we offer more assistance should you need it. Security Health Plan members can receive digital coaching at www.securityhealth.org.

Simply register for Security Health Online by clicking on **My Account** at the top right of the home page at securityhealth.org. Then, click **Register**. Then, once you have it, log in with your user name and password. Advice is available to members 24 hours a day. If you need help registering, call Customer Service at **1-800-472-2363** between 7 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and ask to speak with a health coach.



“I’ve Established Healthy Stress- Relief Habits”

Your progress in achieving a healthier life is significant. You no doubt feel healthier, more energetic and more confident with your positive steps. These changes make you a positive example for others trying to reduce their stress. Your efforts also will have long-term benefits for your quality of life. So take this opportunity to make your healthier habits permanent.

Reflect on your progress

You might want to keep a journal of your experiences to remind yourself of how far you’ve come. Write about how you’ve benefitted from reducing stress. Write about your challenges. What have you learned about reducing stress? How do you feel about managing stress? What helps you stay positive when you face a stressful situation?

Then, when you need a reminder of why you started your healthier habits, read your journal. It just might provide you with the motivation to continue. Let us help you get started.

What made you decide to try to reduce stress? _____

How have you been doing since you started trying to reduce your stress? _____

What changes have you seen in yourself? _____

What advice would you give to people who decide they want to reduce their stress? _____

What has been the best part of reducing stress for you? _____

Build on what you've accomplished

Despite your progress, you won't be able to permanently avoid stress. Everyone has it. Some stress can even be positive because it helps keep you aware of what you need to accomplish. So don't give up on your relaxation techniques or new thought processes when you have stress. Instead, build on your successes. Think about what you might do when you're faced with these situations.

You've been asked to accept a new task or responsibility. Ask yourself:

- *How important is it that I accept this task?*
- *Do I want to do it? Is it important to me?*
- *Is it necessary that I accept this task?*
What will happen if I say "no"?

Step 4

“I’ve Established *Healthy Stress-Relief Habits*”

You face a challenge that automatically makes you think the worst will happen.

- Focus on what positive outcomes are possible. Don’t overwhelm yourself by thinking of consequences.
- Ask for help from people who care about you. Talk about the situation. Sometimes all you might need is a different way of looking at the problem to make you feel better.
- Renew your commitment by finding new techniques to relax. Try a relaxation, meditation or yoga class. Schedule a few minutes every day to practice your breathing exercises or visualization.

Revisit your goals

Do you remember the SMART goals you established in Step 2: **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant** and **Timed**? The goals you established in getting this far helped you reduce stress. But many who start to reduce their stress are unsure of what to do next. Shift your goals now toward maintaining your new habits. Be willing to try new relaxation techniques, exercises or thought processes to continue cutting back on stress. Here are some ideas:

“Starting Monday, I’ll reserve at least four 10-minute sessions during my work week for deep-breathing exercises.”

“Starting Tuesday, I will try practicing visualization at least twice a week.”

What goals would you like to accomplish? Write a few more SMART goals for yourself, and keep doing them until they become healthful habits.



Reward yourself

Reducing stress is a big deal that calls for you to reward yourself for your hard work, especially as you establish your habits long term. Rewards don't have to cost much. They can even be free. Just choose a reward that doesn't undo what you've accomplished.

- Buy some new music that can help you in your breathing, meditation or visualization practices
- Get a massage
- Have dinner at a restaurant that serves healthful food. You won't have to cook dinner and you'll continue your healthful eating practices that aid your relaxation.
- Buy a gym membership
- Plan a weekend away with friends or your spouse

How will you reward yourself? Take a moment to plan your rewards for every month that you maintain your efforts.

SecurityHealth PlanSM

Promises kept, plain and simple.

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