



Managing stress by controlling what you can

Many things in life can cause stress – your job, family, money, housing situation, health, responsibilities and more. The list of possibilities is long, and varies depending on your unique situation. But one universal fact about stress is that it usually comes in one of 2 forms – things you can control and things beyond your control. Breaking down the stress you feel into these categories can help you find ways to reduce the impact of stress on your life.

Can you take actions or decisions to avoid the stress in the first place?

Can you change something, such your own behavior, perspective or communication style, to alter the situation?

Can you adapt to the stress?

Can you learn to accept a certain stressor that you cannot control or change?

Living with stress

Managing stress requires being honest with yourself, being willing to take difficult decisions and asking for help when you need it. Sometimes that means:

- ✓ **Avoiding stressful situations and people in the first place**
- ✓ **Altering the situation by changing your own behavior or communication style**
- ✓ **Adapting to the stressor by altering your own perspective, thought processes or expectations**

And, in some especially difficult situations and relationships, it means learning to accept what you cannot control or change, and figuring out how to live with it and not let it define you. Life can be complicated and unfair – and so can stress. Only you know what’s going on inside and outside of you. But whatever stress you’re facing, the main goal is to find ways to protect your own mental health and wellbeing as best you can.



You can find more tips in this month’s trending topic on [optumwellbeing.com](https://www.optumwellbeing.com).



Taking control of stress

Here's an example of how this process works.

First, write down 3-5 primary points of stress in your life.

Then, go back through each point you wrote down and consider:

- Why is it causing you stress?
- Does the stress point come from inside yourself or outside yourself?
- Is there anything you can do to help ease its impact on you?

For example, if your job is stressing you out, why? Let's say you're afraid you'll be laid off. Ask yourself why you're afraid of this? An external reason could be that your organization has a history of cutting staff when profits are down, and profits are down. An internal reason could be you were laid off from your last job and now worry it'll happen again.

In either case, you can take measures to ease your worries and feel more in control.

For example, if profits are down and layoffs are looming, you could update your resume, keep an eye on job openings, cut back on spending to build a cushion, and reach out to people in your network who may be able to help you find another job.

For example, if it's your own internal dialogue creating the stress, then you could work on reframing your thoughts. Remind yourself that just because your last organization made layoffs doesn't mean your current one will. Also, think about how you recovered from the job loss and found your way to your new job. What did you do in that situation? Is there anything you might do differently if it were to happen again? Is there another company or role you'd be interested in? Thinking through these factors can help you feel calmer, since you'll remember you've been through it before and found your way through.

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