In an attempt to manage stress and anxiety, many people turn to substance use. After prolonged use and abuse, serious and long-term consequences add to already-present tension. While the best stress-reducer is to quit using, it is important to remember stressful situations in life still remain and need to be managed. Reducing stress and anxiety helps make the best recovery possible. In this lesson, you will learn several tools you can use to help manage and eliminate stresses caused by substance use disorders.
STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES IN RECOVERY

In an attempt to manage stress and anxiety, many people turn to substance use. After prolonged use and abuse, serious and long-term consequences add to already-present tension. While the best stress-reducer is to quit using, it is important to remember stressful situations in life still remain and need to be managed. Reducing stress and anxiety helps make the best recovery possible.

COPING WITH STRESS

Many people try to change the problem but spend little effort managing their emotional reactions to stressful situations. Most things in life are made up of events and emotional responses to those events. For example, if you are driving on a wet road, you must control your driving and manage your anxiety at the same time. If you meet with your probation officer, you must be aware of and control your emotions while having a conversation that impacts the direction of your life. If you go to an interview, you need to regulate how you conduct yourself and handle your internal tension. Coping with life’s stressors means you need to be problem-focused and emotion-focused at the same time. Both parts of stress management are important, and both can be improved.

Coping is divided into two categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem-Focused</th>
<th>Emotion-Focused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You work to change, manage, and minimize the stressful event.</td>
<td>You work to change, manage, and minimize your emotional reaction to the stressful event.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MANAGING STRESS
Following are several tools you can use to help manage and eliminate stresses caused by substance use disorders.

1 Solidify your sobriety goal.
If you are in treatment, you have an opportunity to rethink your life and plan your long-term recovery. Spend some time considering what you are trying to accomplish in treatment and beyond. What are your primary reasons for doing the hard work of recovery? Having a solid plan and sticking to it can decrease your stress, anxiety, and concern about the future.

What are your main reasons for getting sober and living a life of long-term recovery?
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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

2 Resolve guilt and forgive yourself.
Many stressors in life are consequences of your own choices. Rather than beat yourself up for past mistakes, find a way to forgive yourself and move on. Identify areas you can improve and determine changes you can make. See yourself as imperfect, accepted, and forgiven.

List several key pieces from your past for which you are willing to take responsibility, forgive yourself, and move on.
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

3 Celebrate progress.
As you move forward in recovery, find ways to highlight things you have done right, positive connections in your life, and progress you have made. Reward yourself for accomplishments made possible by your sobriety. Share your recent accomplishments with supportive friends.

List several important successes you’ve had recently. How can you reward yourself for those accomplishments?
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_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
4 Create a cheerleading team.
Everyone needs support and encouragement. When you are isolated and alone, stress increases. Find and develop close connections with those who support your recovery and stay distant from those who do not.

Who believes the best about you and will be good support in your recovery efforts?
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

5 Be proactive in solving problems.
Most situations become worse when you procrastinate and avoid them. Having set your goals for long-term recovery, stay deliberate, planned, and purposeful in your actions. Procrastination adds to your stress level and can cause you to feel overwhelmed and frustrated.

List several goals and break them into doable parts. Identify specific strategies to help you accomplish your goals. What positive activities could you add?
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
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_______________________________________________________________________

6 Decrease harmful situational stressors.
As you work toward your long-term goal of recovery, consider lifestyle changes you need to make. For many people, making plans in advance and intentionally structuring activities can be very helpful. Think through positive activities you can add and events you should avoid.

List harmful situations, triggering events, and difficult circumstances you need to avoid or manage better. What positive activities can you add?
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

7 Increase your tolerance for negative events.
In addition to solving problems, find ways to overlook difficulties, handle adversity, and cope with setbacks. Not every problem in life can be eliminated, so it is necessary to manage your mood and attitude when difficulties do arise. You can develop a confident attitude and a positive perspective, even in the middle of trying circumstances.
NOTES

When you see yourself favorably, you tend to have more energy and believe in your ability to accomplish tasks.

List two areas in life that cause you frustration. How can you increase your tolerance or better manage ordinary inconveniences?

1. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

Maintain a healthy, positive self-image.

Seeing yourself positively can increase motivation. When you see yourself favorably, you tend to have more energy and believe in your ability to accomplish tasks. This helps you manage stress in healthier ways.

List three positive characteristics about yourself.

1. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

Commit yourself to physical and recreational activities.

Anxiety and stress can decrease if you stay physically active. Exercise releases endorphins, which act as the body’s natural antidepressant. Anxious people often worry about their health. Staying active will help you stay healthy, lower your anxiety, raise your self-esteem, and help you get in shape. Consider simple activities such as going for a walk or riding your bike.
List three physically active interests, activities, or hobbies you enjoy.

1. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
2. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
3. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

**10 Practice relaxation techniques.**

Progressive muscle relaxation, guided meditation, and deep breathing exercises will help you manage anxiety. These methods also help to reduce general stress levels.

Name one calming activity you can do daily.

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

**11 Accept responsibility for the problems you caused.**

The first step toward solving problems is to take responsibility for your actions. Blame-shifting and excusing your behavior will not allow you to focus your energy on solutions. Not every problem or difficulty can be solved. Focus on what you can control, not what you can’t.

List three current difficult situations you are facing and consider your responsibility in each one. What can you do to change the results of each circumstance?

1. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
2. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
3. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

**12 Solve the problems you can.**

Looking at the problems you listed above, formulate a plan to change the situation or manage your reaction better. Can you ask for help, delegate certain responsibilities, apply more effort, or think it through differently?
Write down some options for solving the problems you listed on the previous page.

1. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

**Increase self-control.**

Developing self-control will allow you to better manage your mood, disposition, attitude, and behavior. You are not able to control other people or every situation. However, you can slow yourself down, become less impulsive, and take time to consider the long-term consequences of your choices and actions. You can also control your character. Keep a positive, upbeat, and optimistic attitude. Smile, laugh, and enjoy your life. Be known for having the best attitude and character.

List three areas where you can delay gratification, manage your impulses, and set personal limits.

1. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________

**UP FOR THE CHALLENGE**

Stressful situations cannot be eliminated from your life but the anxiety and worry they bring can be managed. Use the tools in this chapter to help navigate stressors in life, keep your long-term sobriety goals solid, and strengthen your recovery. Face the challenges ahead with confidence, knowing you are strong and fully able to manage any and all stressful situations as they come.