

Self-help series fact sheet 7

Managing stress

Being unwell or ill adds new sources of stress, such as the ongoing discomfort of symptoms, uncertainty about the future and financial pressure. It also changes how sensitive we are to stress and its physiological effects; the effects of a given level of stress are greater than they would be for a healthy person.

Because stress is so common and so debilitating, we recommend that people with long COVID use multiple techniques to manage it. A typical stress management plan might include:

- ✓ **Light exercise**, but only add this if you are able to.
- ✓ **Getting outside** and experiencing fresh air and sunshine.
- ✓ **Daily relaxation practice**
- ✓ **Living by a schedule**
- ✓ **Meditation**

Other ideas include:

1. Pleasurable activities every day.
2. Having an orderly home: In recent years, psychologist research has begun to find that living and working in cluttered spaces causes stress and anxiety and can harm both our mental health and our productivity.



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3. Avoiding noisy environments and negative people (and this includes family members, friends, co-workers and others).
4. Massages.
5. Writing in journals – have a gratitude journal, or at the end of each day write down your gripes, complaints or just I HATE BEING SICK.
6. Breathe. Slow, deep breaths can help lower blood pressure and heart rate.
7. Listen to music.
8. Take a quick walk.

One way to cope with stress is by changing our habitual ways of responding to it, so that stressors do not have the same effect as they used to. One approach is through relaxation. By using relaxation techniques such as:

- Relaxation through breathing.
- Body scan, where you focus on different parts of the body one at a time.
- Relaxation through imagery, such as imagining your happy place, whether that's the beach or the mountains.
- Meditation or learn Tai Chi.
- You can learn how to reduce muscle tension and anxiety. The effectiveness of these builds over time, and some techniques work well for one person and other techniques work better for another.

If you need further information or support please have a look at our website at www.EmergeACT.org.au or the long COVID playlist on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@arthritisact3717