

# Common Coping Responses for Stress

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We all find ways of coping with **stress**. Some coping strategies are not as helpful as others. For example, negative coping responses often make your stress worse, because they wear you down over time or are temporary distractions. On the other hand, positive coping responses keep you in the present moment and give you chances to actively work toward solving your problems. Not all positive coping responses will work for every person. Try several until you find one that works for you.

## Positive coping responses

- Listening to music
- Playing with a pet
- Laughing or crying
- Going out with a friend (shopping, movie, dining)
- Taking a bath or shower
- Writing, painting, or doing other creative activities
- Praying or going to church
- Exercising or getting outdoors to enjoy nature
- Discussing situations with a spouse or close friend
- Gardening or making home repairs
- Practicing deep breathing, meditation, or muscle relaxation
- Making and following through with an **action plan** (What is a **PDF** document?) to solve your problems.
- Seeking counseling if you continue to struggle with stress.

## Negative coping responses

- Criticizing yourself (negative self-talk)
- Driving fast in a car
- Chewing your fingernails
- Becoming aggressive or violent (hitting someone, throwing or kicking something)
- Eating too much or too little or drinking a lot of coffee
- Smoking or chewing tobacco

- Drinking alcohol
- Yelling at your spouse, children, or friends
- Taking a recreational drug, or misusing prescription medicine
- Avoiding friends and family

All coping responses have limitations. They may:

- Not be available on a regular basis or often enough to do the most good.
- Not produce the complete relaxation that is best for undoing the harmful effects of stress.
- Sometimes lead to new kinds of stress (such as a vacation that becomes hectic or a highly competitive sports activity).
- Stop being effective because of overuse.

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