

Self-care tips on stress management that you can easily put into practice

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Credit: University of Southern California

To a certain degree, everyone experiences stress: We feel nervous meeting with a job interviewer, have anxiety about making it to an appointment on time or feel ourselves holding our breath while watching

a tense playoff game. These are normal, everyday stressors.

But many people suffer from more severe or long-term [stress](#), which can have damaging effects on our mind, body and personal relationships. April is National Stress Awareness Month and USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work Clinical Professor Murali Nair and Clinical Associate Professor Kim Goodman shared their insights on the importance of [stress management](#), and how stress can be alleviated through a few mindful self-care methods.

Why stress is a real health issue

In small doses, stress is not necessarily detrimental to our physical and mental well-being.

"We all need a little stress in our lives or else we won't get up in the morning and complete our daily tasks," Nair said. "But we do need to create awareness surrounding the threats of [chronic stress](#)."

If not properly managed, stress can take a serious toll on our physical [health](#). Longitudinal studies have shown that sleeplessness, migraine headaches, weight gain, irritation and lack of concentration are just a few of the potential side effects of long-term stress. What's more, these harmful effects can fan out and have a more serious effect on one's physical and mental health.

"Chronic stress can lead to depression, anxiety, low tolerance levels and interpersonal relationship challenges," Goodman said.

There is also a connection between stress and potentially life-threatening health issues like diabetes and heart disease.

"When we're under stress, sometimes we cope negatively in the social

sphere —whether by smoking, drinking, using drugs or engaging in other high-risk behaviors—all of which can be connected with devastating health outcomes," she said.

More tips on how to manage stress

One of the best ways to combat stress, large or small, is by practicing effective self-care.

The caregiving nature of [social work](#) and nursing may inhibit many professionals' abilities to set boundaries and prioritize their own well-being. According to Goodman, social workers and nurses often see caregiving as a central part of their identity. However, in the midst of caring for clients, patients, friends, family, parents or children, they often forget to care for themselves. Self-care is a critical component in relieving stress and attending to one's overall health needs, whether mental or physical.

Many social workers and nurses do not invest properly in self-care due to the perceived time commitment and monetary demands of activities traditionally associated with self-care, such as getting a massage or taking a vacation. While both Nair and Goodman agree that self-care has, in many ways, become a multibillion dollar industry, they affirm that there are plenty of self-care techniques that are not time-consuming or expensive.

"Simple things like breathwork, exercise, yoga, music and art don't require a single penny, and can be incredibly effective in relieving stress," Goodman said.

Nair favors breathing and stretching exercises, in addition to simply laughing—he teaches weekly laughter workshops on the USC campus for students, faculty and staff in which participants practice evidence-

based laughing techniques as a way to relieve stress and boost their moods. Other stress-reduction techniques he recommends include spending time with those that matter to you, practicing mindfulness, developing more realistic expectations for yourself and finding a hobby or recreational pursuit that you enjoy.

Provided by University of Southern California

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