

# Q&A: You can't always stop stress, but here's how to feel more in control

July 6 2020, by Elisa Huang

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Do you feel overwhelmed thinking of your to-do list? Or do you wear your busyness like a badge of pride?

Ritu Riyat has seen it all. She works with clients through The Stress Detox, a framework she created to reduce [stress](#) and burnout in the workplace. "It's not about eliminating stress in our lives," she says. "It's developing a relationship with it."

Her [stress management online course](#) has reached more than 3,000 students worldwide and she recently brought her expertise to the USC Alumni Association webinar "[Resilience Through Times of Uncertainty](#) ." She talks with USC editor Elisa Huang about four common concerns she hears—and how to rethink living mindfully.

## **1. Just hearing the word "stress" stresses me out, so I don't think about it**

Stress is not inherently bad. It helps us keep alert, focused and tapped into our creative energy. It even takes us into that flow state where we're really immersed in what we're doing. So think of stress as your body's natural response to change. When changes occur, we fall somewhere on the stress spectrum. Change is constant, and so is our body's response to it. But it's important to recognize that, when left unchecked, stress can get ugly.

## **2. I don't see the point of meditation**

[Meditation](#) doesn't need to be an hour every day; even five minutes helps. When you become quiet and still, chances are that your mind will be flooded with thoughts. This is normal. The point of [meditation](#) is to develop awareness, to notice these thoughts but not attach to them. In this way, you strengthen your ability to respond versus react. End your meditation by bringing to mind one experience—small or large—that you are grateful for. Gratitude flips your [mental state](#) into thinking about what you already have, not what you can't control.



Ritu Riyat. Credit: Ritu Riyat

### **3. The pandemic is the reason I'm stressed all the time**

When change happens rapidly, it can short-circuit our ability to adapt, which is what a lot of people experienced at the beginning of the pandemic. We lost our routines, which help us have some level of control. They put our mind at ease because we know what's coming. Focus on what you can control—healthy routines are key. Something as simple as a five-minute morning meditation or drinking a glass of water can make a huge difference.

## 4. When I feel stress, I can't control it

Do small things to interrupt the response in that moment to give your [nervous system](#) a little relief and calm. Take slow, deep breaths—it may take 60 to 90 seconds, because they say it takes 90 seconds for an emotion to process through you. Try smiling. Even if it's a fake smile or laugh, in that moment you can't be angry at the same time. And move your body to shift your emotional energy into a physical one. Sometimes I'll just start jumping up and down for 90 seconds to let that adrenaline go.

**More information:** The Stress Detox: [thestressdetox.com/](http://thestressdetox.com/)

Provided by University of Southern California

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