

MANAGING STRESS AND TRACKING MOOD



We should all try to avoid stress in our lives, but it's particularly important when you have multiple sclerosis (MS). Stress can cause your symptoms to worsen and negatively affect your mood, heightening your anxiety level and possibly leading to depression.

Tracking your stress triggers and moods every day is one way to take control and make positive changes.

You can do so in a journal or by using a mobile app or a text message-based system (like HealthCentral's Mood 24/7). Or, maybe you're more inclined to blog as a way of reflecting on your physical and emotional state.

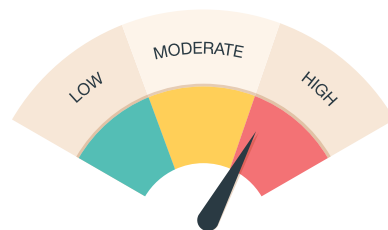
Tracking your mood, and making lifestyle changes based on patterns you find, can help you adopt effective stress-reduction strategies. If you like, you can also share this information with your doctor and caregiver.

STRESS RELIEVERS AND MOOD BOOSTERS

Not all mood-boosting or stress-relief strategies are helpful for everyone. But some of the tips below could help improve your day-to-day quality of life. Give them a try, and track your progress in a journal.

- **Express your feelings**, as opposed to suppressing them.
- **Prioritize positivity** in your daily life.
- **Avoid self-blame.**
- **Don't sugarcoat it.** When you're not feeling upbeat, don't pretend to be.
- **Discuss your condition** when you want to. It's your choice when and where to discuss your MS symptoms.
- **Reassert control** over the elements of your life you're able to, such as your outlook.
- **Do, watch, or listen to** something that will make you laugh.
- **Seek out hobbies**, activities, or new experiences tailored to your mobility level. You might:
 - Try yoga, tai chi, or dancing.
 - Start walking, swimming, or doing other types of exercise after consulting your doctor.
 - Try acupuncture.
 - Meditate or pray.
 - Spend time with a friend.
 - Play with a friend's pet.
 - Try aromatherapy.
 - Join a book or movie group.
 - Listen to podcasts.
 - Do small art projects.

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With multiple sclerosis, if you're subjected to extra stress, you may experience some of the following:

- ☐ Increased vulnerability to illness
- ☐ Difficulty communicating or remembering
- ☐ Worsening symptoms like shaking or tremors
- ☐ Depression (feeling hopeless, overwhelmed, not in control)
- ☐ Denial or guilt
- ☐ Anger, fear, and worry
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ A desire to push others away to protect them
- ☐ Obsessive fixation on small details

If you have any symptoms of depression or anxiety, speak to your doctor about possible treatment options. You may also want to seek out support groups, either through online MS communities or in-person groups.

Sources: msif.org; nationalmssociety.org; nchpad.org; NIH.gov

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