

# Color Me Stress Free

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## Description:

Do you know what stress is? Is it good or bad? Do you know how to recognize when you are stressed? Can stress impact our health? Is it preventable? Manageable? Why should we be knowledgeable about it? This interactive program was developed to educate participants about stress, how to recognize it and how it can be managed.

## Goal Statement:

Practicing Stress Management Techniques + Good Health + Happiness = Lowered Risk for Heart Conditions, Obesity, High Blood Pressure, Depression/Anxiety

## Objectives:

Participants will be able to understand stress.  
Participants will be able to identify potential stressors.  
Participants will have knowledge about various techniques to achieve stress management.  
Participants will be able to make changes that will improve their mental and emotional health.

## Lesson Plan Directions:

Copy, distribute, and review the handouts. *It is recommended that you practice a few of the management techniques on page three and four of this lesson and then discuss as a group.*

1. What is stress?
2. Is stress good or bad?
3. Side Effects and Signals of Stress
4. Prevention and Management

## Handouts:

- 5 Things You Should Know About Stress
  - Publication can be found and printed at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>
- Mandala Coloring Page

## Other Materials Needed (not included):

- Colored pencils, markers, crayons, etc. of choice

## Resources:

1. <https://health.gov/myhealthfinder/topics/health-conditions/heart-health/manage-stress>
2. <https://us.ditchthelabel.org/101-ultimate-ways-chill-reduce-stress/>

3. [http://www.jiss.org/documents/volume\\_8/JISS%202018%208\(1\)%201-21%20Coloring%20and%20Mindfulness.pdf](http://www.jiss.org/documents/volume_8/JISS%202018%208(1)%201-21%20Coloring%20and%20Mindfulness.pdf)
4. <https://www.piedmont.org/living-better/do-coloring-books-for-adults-decrease-stress>

### **Lesson Plan:**

This lesson is focused on stress and different ways to manage it. It only takes a little time to achieve lower levels of anxiety, which in turn have big rewards. One can practice managing stress and in turn, lower their risk for heart conditions, obesity, high blood pressure and depression. If that alone isn't a big reward, increased happiness is also an outcome of managing stress. This lesson focuses on six areas surrounding the topic of stress.

1. What is stress?
2. Is stress good or bad?
3. Side Effects and Signals of Stress
4. Prevention and Management

### **What is stress?**

Stress is bumper-to-bumper traffic when you're in a hurry. It is a worrisome illness, an argument with your partner or a family member. It is the need to care for an ailing family member and a pile of unpaid bills. Stress has many faces and creeps into our lives from many different directions. No matter what causes it, stress puts the body and the mind on edge. It floods the body with stress hormones (i.e. cortisol). The heart pounds. Muscles tense. Breathing quickens. The stomach churns. The body's response to stress was honed in our prehistory. Collectively called the "fight-or-flight" response. This response has helped humans survive threats like animal attacks, fires, floods, and conflict with other humans. Today, obvious dangers like those aren't the main things that trigger the stress response. Any situation you perceive as threatening, or which requires you to adjust to a change, can set it off. And that can spell trouble. It is important to remember that everyone has different perceptions of stress and responds different to situations. For example, you may have a higher or lower stress "tolerance" to certain events compared to your partner or friend.

### **Is stress good or bad?**

Did you know that there are two types of stress? The first type is called, distress. This is the awful, normal stress that leads to late-night hair-tearing sessions. The other type of stress is called, eustress. Eustress is good, or positive stress. It is not as wild as you think. If you enjoy scary movies, you know the feeling: The killer is right around the corner, the last protagonist alive is hiding behind the tree, and your heart is pounding. Yes, your body is experiencing stress in this situation! You're also excited, intrigued, and eager to keep watching though. You'll experience spells of eustress throughout your life and it can be easy to mistake them for regular distress. Perhaps you're about to move to a new state all by yourself. Sure, you are scared. You may be living alone in a new place where you know no one. Eustress is pushing you to new heights. It encourages you to dive into new experiences and make tough decisions.

### **Are there side effects and signals of stress?**

Stress is key for survival, but too much stress can be detrimental to one's health. Emotional stress that stays around for weeks or months can do serious damage. It has the capability of weakening the immune system and causing high blood pressure, fatigue, depression, and even heart disease. Persistent or too much adrenaline, also known as epinephrine in our bodies can be harmful to the human heart. It can damage blood vessels and arteries, increasing blood pressure and raising the risk of heart attacks and strokes. It also inhibits cell

regeneration. It may be tough to tell when you're experiencing good or bad stress. The human body typically shows signs if one is experiencing stress. Remember that we are all different, therefore your partner or friend may experience different symptoms or signs than you may. It is also important to remember that everyone has different "tolerances" to stressful events. The human body may send signals or red flags to let you know that you are stressed. A few warning signs may include:

- Inability to concentrate or complete tasks that you normally might be able to do
- Lower immune system
- Body aches that you normally may not have
- Headaches
- Neck pain
- Irritability - more angry or anxious than usual
- Indigestion, heartburn, ulcers
- High blood pressure
- Trouble falling sleeping or staying awake
- Changes in appetite (eating less or eating more)
- Mood swings
- Lack of motivation, confidence and/or self-esteem

### **Prevention and Management:**

If you're living with high levels of stress, you're putting your entire well-being at risk. Stress takes a toll on one's health. It narrows one's ability to think clearly, function effectively, and enjoy life. It may seem like there's nothing you can do about stress. The bills won't stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day, and your work and family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think. Effective stress management helps you break the hold stress has on your life, so you can be happier, healthier, and more productive. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, hobbies, relationships, relaxation, and fun. It also means having the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on. With that being said, stress management is not one-size-fits-all. That's why it's important to experiment and find out what technique(s) best for you. Listed below are 7 different techniques one can try to achieve stress management.

1. **Reframe your thinking:** One of the most research-supported treatments for stress and anxiety is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). At the root of this therapy approach is the understanding that our thoughts influence our emotions, which in turn influences our behaviours. Reframing your thoughts around a stressor can help manage your emotions, reducing feelings of stress. Some tips: If you feel yourself spiralling into imagining worst-case scenarios, stop and put your mind elsewhere. Set realistic expectations for yourself. Strive for acceptance of situations outside of your control.
2. **Cultivate social support:** According to the National Institutes of Health, strong social support can improve resilience to stress. Reach out strategically. Some friends or family members may be good at listening and sympathizing. Others might excel at practical help, like bringing over a home-cooked meal or covering an hour of child care. *Giving* support can also increase positive emotions and decrease negative emotions. Make sure that your relationships stay in balance. A friend who requires support, but never gives it may increase your stress level.
3. **Get physical:** Brisk movement can not only improve sleep, it can directly combat stress. Physical activity may cancel out some of the negative effects of stress, including

the impact of stress on the immune system. Adding physical activity doesn't have to be expensive or complex. For example, taking a brisk 30-minute walk or participating in a dance session or group fitness class in the living room can do the trick.

4. **Spend Time in Nature:** Studies conducted in multiple countries have found that green space improves mood. Even nature videos can speed the recovery from stress compared with videos of urban scenes. Taking a moment to notice nature even in the form of a bustling city park can refocus and calm your mind.
5. **Meditate:** A strong body of research shows that mindful meditation can reduce psychological stress and anxiety, even short-term mindfulness meditation programs work. To get started, set aside five minutes in a quiet place to sit and breathe. Focus on the present moment; if stray thoughts intrude, acknowledge them and then let them go. Don't judge yourself for any mental wavering. Gently refocus and bring the attention back to the present moment. Another form of meditation is colouring. Do you think this activity is only a childhood pastime? Think again! Colouring has the ability to relax the fear centre of your brain, the amygdala. This activity has the ability to generate mindfulness and quietness. *This lesson includes a mandala colouring page for you to incorporate; plan to colour for 15-20 minutes.*
6. **Deep Breathing:** Have you ever noticed how you breathe when you feel relaxed? The next time you are relaxed, take a moment to notice how your body feels. Or think about how you breathe when you first wake up in the morning or just before you fall asleep. There are lots of breathing exercises you can do to help relax. Below are a few different exercises you can try to achieve relaxation. They are simple to learn and easy to do. One may need to try deep breathing activities often in order to achieve relaxation.
  - a. **Complete Breathing:** Sit up straight and exhale. Inhale and relax your stomach muscles. Feel your belly expand as your lungs fill with air. Keep breathing in until you feel your chest expand with a deep breath. Hold the breath for a moment and exhale slowly, pulling your belly in to feel the last bit of air leaving your lungs. Close your eyes, relax, and concentrate on breathing like this for five minutes.
  - b. **Humming Breathing:** Follow the same instructions for Complete Breathing, but when you get to the exhale, hum as you release the air from your body. Pull your belly muscles in as you hum the last of the air out of your body. Relax and practice this exercise for two to three minutes.
  - c. **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** The easiest way to practice this breath exercise is to lie on your back. Place one hand over your navel and your other hand above it on your stomach. Now concentrate on breathing from your diaphragm. If you can see the hand over your navel rising before the hand above it, you are doing this exercise correctly. Relax and concentrate on your breathing for five minutes.
  - d. **Buteyko Breathing:** This breathing exercise is especially helpful for people who have breathing problems like asthma. Start by finding a comfortable resting position in a quiet place and, instead of taking a deep breath, concentrate on taking shallow breaths in slowly through your nose. This method can slow the cycle of rapid, gasping breaths people experience with an asthma attack or in a stressful situation.

