

10 COPING STRATEGIES

For Overwhelm And
Overwhelming Times

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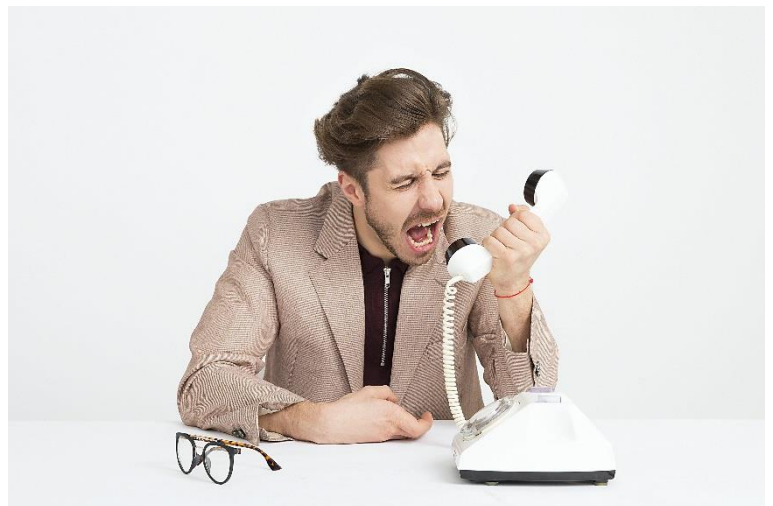
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Introduction

Everyone experiences bouts of stress, the feeling of being overwhelmed or pressured. Sometimes it lasts just minutes. Sometimes it stretches into hours. It is relieved either because the situation passes easily or because you have effectively used your coping strategies to manage the feelings of overwhelm.

Sometimes, though, that overwhelm will not go away. It spirals out of control and it lasts for weeks or even months. It feels as though there's a 30-foot wave bearing down on you and no matter how hard you run you know it's going to crash down right on top of you.

The idea of overwhelm is simple, it's feeling as though you are completely overcome, whether it's emotionally or psychologically.



When a stressor feels too big to manage you grow overwhelmed. There are many faces to feeling overwhelmed. Ultimately, it stirs up intense emotions, such as irritability, anxiety, anger, doubt, helplessness, and worry. It may result in panic attacks, crying spells, lashing out, or other negative behaviors. Often, anxiety grows in the face of overwhelm.

10 Coping Strategies For Overwhelm And Overwhelming Times

Overwhelm can be caused by absolutely anything, from the grief of loss to an unmanageable to-do list. Regardless of the cause, there are plenty of coping strategies you can use when you are dealing with overwhelming times or a feeling of overwhelm. Let's discuss ten of them.

Manage Overwhelm-Inducing Thoughts

If you want to find the foundation or backbone of those feelings of overwhelm, look at your thoughts. When you focus on the unpredictability of life or allow your thoughts to get out of control, then you are creating additional stress.

Those unreasonable, unrealistic thoughts are stress's best friend. That's why you have to pay plenty of attention to the thoughts you think and the stories you tell yourself.

For example, if you have an unmanageable to-do list and you constantly think about how it's impossible and you'll never get through it, then you're thinking a damaging thought. Those types of thoughts are distressing and they fuel anxiety.

It can be paralyzing and what you *don't want* in that moment is to be paralyzed. What you *do want* is to take action and move into problem-solving mode. You can't do that if you're busy focused on those unhelpful, unreasonable, inaccurate thoughts. You just can't.



Therefore, to take action, you have to start by thinking more positive thoughts in order to generate more positive emotions and actions.

For example, when you are faced with an overwhelming thought about your to-do list, dismiss it, and come up with an alternative such as *"I don't have to get everything done today, some things can wait until tomorrow."*

Likewise, the idea of multitasking... it's not helping. You are likely getting less done by attempting to multi-task and you're lying to yourself if you think otherwise. You don't have to do *everything* all at once. Prioritize.

Let The Ball Drop

WHAT?! I know, it sounds absolutely terrifying, doesn't it? Probably because the phrase dropped the ball has such negative connotations.

Generally, when someone says the ball was dropped it's related to someone making mistakes or failing to see out their responsibilities. However, the reality is that you cannot juggle everything and you shouldn't have to.

So, in this case, dropping the ball is more to do with focusing on what really matters and letting go of everything else by managing your time more effectively.

Focus On What Really Matters.

Let Go Of Everything Else.

This is how to do that:

- Removing any professional/personal commitments that are unnecessary or unimportant (at least for the time being).
- Delegate the tasks that *are* important but aren't worth *your* time. Just assign it to someone else, whether it's at the office or asking your partner to grab the groceries.
- For tasks that are not urgent, but do need to be completed *by you*, simply put them on your schedule when you have time to get them done. Just defer them!
- For now, focus on doing what is urgent and important. Get those done ASAP and stop sweating the rest.

Build Boundaries

Boundaries are necessary to maintain a balanced, healthy life. They're also an effective way to manage stress because boundaries help you fight the urge to spread yourself too thin. There is just one problem – boundaries take time and practice. However, there are a few key steps that will help you build (and preserve) your boundaries.

1. The first step is to get a better handle on what you're dealing with. You need to know your limitations.
2. Once you know your limitations, you can tune into your inner-self and get to know your feelings better.
3. You *have* to be honest and direct and not just with the people in your life, but with yourself. If you're someone who hates to say no you need to get rid of that guilt immediately. You can only handle what you can handle,

don't just say yes to everyone and everything because you're a nice person who likes to show you're capable. You will push yourself into overwhelm time and time again until you nail this step.

4. Which brings us to the next point – say no. More importantly, *permit yourself* to say no!
5. Be more self-aware. As you develop self-awareness you will get a better handle on what you are (and aren't) capable of and you will be more aware of when stress is mounting.
6. A healthy relationship is reciprocal. Are there relationships in your life where all you do is give while the other person takes, takes, and takes?
7. Practice self-care – you have to make yourself a priority.
8. Seek support when you need help tackling everything you're dealing with.
9. Be assertive!

There's also time-blocking which can make saying no and preserving your boundaries a much easier exercise. Time-blocking is simply an exercise where you schedule your time. Doing this will allow you to add self-care blocks of time, as well as flexible spots for if something comes up.

One Step At A Time

One of the biggest obstacles people face is the point we highlighted in the first coping strategy. It can be challenging to change your mind. If



that's something you are struggling to do, then try changing your body and environment.

For example, if you feel twitchy, if you feel over-anxious, then mix things up and go jogging in the park. If you feel teary or stressed out, then call a close friend who you know always has a joke up their sleeve. It might sound like time-wasting, but changing your energy is important.

You can only move one step at a time and if you are trapped in overwhelm it will feel as though you're drowning in quicksand. So, taking the time to change your energy and hit the reset button is serving your one step at a time game plan.

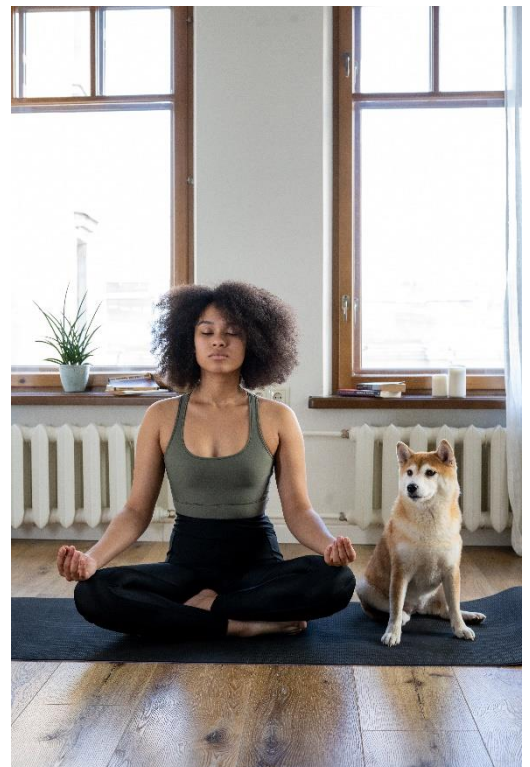
While you take one step at a time, don't forget the big picture. It's easy to feel completely overwhelmed by a work deadline, a growing laundry pile, or even a tarrying personal project.

Life is a beautiful journey and this moment of overwhelm *will* pass. It's temporary. You have a home, you have food on the table, you have a bed to rest in, you have friends to lean on for support, and you have dreams.

All of this is only temporary. Your to-do list can wait.

A Moment Of Meditation

It might seem as though meditation is the answer to just about every issue in life. Well, it is an excellent way to manage stress. The simple fact of the matter is that meditation has been proven time and time again to relieve stress by



calming both your body and mind (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/meditation/in-depth/meditation/art-20045858>).

If you are brand new to meditation, then start the exercise by simply spending five minutes in total silence. You don't have to do anything but breathe and embrace the stillness around you. If you struggle with sitting still and avoiding racing thoughts, try a mantra or word you can repeat. It's up to you what that is.

Forget The What ifs

If there is one phrase on this planet that fuels worry and stress it's *but what if?* Why on earth would you want to think about what could have been if you had decided differently?

Why on earth would you want to punish yourself by doing such a thing? This life can twist and turn in millions of different directions. And, it's kind of nice to think about every major decision creating an alternate universe where you in this universe take one path and an alternate version of you walks the other path creating millions of different universes where you live out each of these realities.

Forget The What ifs

It's just a nice thought and while no one can say for sure whether that's real or not, it doesn't matter.

You're living *this* life and constantly asking *what if* is not going to help you manage stress or cope with what's going on. Instead of asking what if start asking what next?

Positive Disconnection

There's a difference between avoiding and disconnecting. Sometimes, the best thing you can do to manage your stress is to disconnect from the world and go off-grid to get your stressors under control.

For example, if you answer work emails at any hour, you're giving others the expectation that you are always available which means they will continue to contact you outside of working hours.

Leave work at work and make your home life about your partner, children, or friends and family. Put your phone down, turn off your laptop, and focus on the people you love. Sit in silence on a grassy field and breathe fresh air.

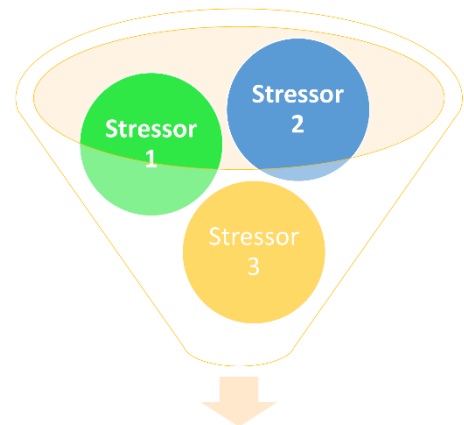
You will be amazed by just how effective this can be as a stress-reliever. If technology is something you struggle with, then try using an app blocker that will cut you off at certain points of the day.

Identify Stressors

Stress hits different for everyone and we all experience it differently and for different reasons.

One situation that throws you for a loop may be barely a blip on the radar for someone and vice versa. When you learn to identify your stressors, then you put yourself in a better position to cope with overwhelm. Let's talk about stressors.

- **Emotional** – these are typically internal stressors, which include anxiety and fear as well as encompassing personality traits such as pessimism or perfectionism. These stressors can distort your perception (of you, of the



IDENTIFY STRESSORS

world, and the people in your life). Emotional stressors are very much down to the individual.

- **Family** – financial issues, unruly children, empty-nest syndrome, and relationship problems can all create a feeling of overwhelm if left unresolved.
- **Social** – these stressors can be related to social situations, dating, public speaking, and similar social situations. Just like emotional stressors, they are an individual thing. Not everyone has crippling anxiety at the idea of attending a party, but if you do you have to learn how to manage those situations.
- **Change** – if you are experiencing major changes in your life, from having a baby to breaking up, getting married, or starting a new job, then this can create overwhelm.
- **Work** – there is tremendous pressure to produce quality performances at work, especially if you want to climb the ladder. A lot of overwhelm stems from the workplace as we deal with tight deadlines as well as difficult bosses and social demands.
- **Additionally, there are decision stressors, physical stressors, pain, and disease stressors.** Your first step is to write out all of these categories and consider what is going on in your life that could be contributing to your stress. Some will fall into more than one category. The idea of categorizing your stressors is to simply make it easier to think of all of the issues that

could be contributing to your stress because often, there is more than just one issue at play. Once you have identified your stressors you can learn to manage them more effectively, which brings us to our next point.

Build A Plan

Take a look at the list of stressors you created in the last step. There are likely a bunch of things you can immediately let go of, like spending your one day off a week cleaning your house from top to bottom. There are a dozen solutions to address that problem and you only need to choose one.

For those that you cannot eliminate you can reduce their intensity. For example, if you struggle with concentrating because office noise or background noise throws you off your game you can either invest in a great set of earplugs or try listening to classical music through earphones.

If your commute is driving you to despair, then try another route, consider carpooling, or look into public transport to allow you to complete a relaxing activity en route to work.



Ultimately, a coping strategy is your best bet to overcome the majority of stressors on your list. That might sound hopeless, especially if you thought you could simply eradicate them all. However, there are plenty of solutions available to you, and building a plan will help you get there.

Go through your stressor list and write an E next to everything you can eliminate, put an I next to those things whose intensity you can reduce, and then use a C to mark the stressors you need to cope with.

If there is an E or an I, you can write out how you plan to tackle them. For the rest, you can choose which coping strategies will work best and build a plan putting it all together.

Be Realistic

While I would encourage everyone to dream big and aim high, I would also encourage you to be realistic. If you aim high and create a giant to-do list that stresses you out because it's impossible to complete, then you're adding stress.

You only have 24 hours in a day and you should be sleeping for at least seven of those. So, be ambitious with your goals, but be realistic with the time it will take to get there.

Summary

When you are faced with overwhelming moments in life, you can allow it to overwhelm you or you can take control by putting coping strategies to good use.

The ten coping strategies listed above will help you get your stress under control, whether it's one, four, or all ten of them. You are strong enough to overcome whatever is going on in your life.



