

# Stress management techniques for people with MS

**Stress management techniques provide effective ways to cope with or alter stressful situations. There are several ways of coping with stress and the following are some suggestions to help yourself:**

## **Learning to recognise what you can control and what you can't control**

When you find yourself stressed ask yourself 'Is this something I have any control over?'

**If the answer is yes**, take any action you know will relieve the stress. It might be something as simple as saying no to your boss.

**If the answer to your question is no**, then 'let go' of the situation that is causing the stress. Remind yourself of the well known message from the American philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr: 'Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference'.

## **If you are struggling with the above, seek support from someone you can trust**

Often by talking through issues with someone else they help you to see things in a different light.

## **Set realistic goals and plan ahead**

With MS being so unpredictable, even the most careful planning can be upsetting, but having contingency plans in place for everyday activities could reduce stress if the unexpected happens.

It's sometimes impossible to avoid the stress and frustration of a cancelled day out, or a delayed task you wanted to get done. In these cases it could be a case of managing everyone's expectations. Let those who need to know that there is a chance – however small it might be – that the MS could delay your plans.

## **Monitor your own negative self-talk and thinking styles by challenging the way you think**

Is your automatic reaction a true representation of what is happening?

## **Keep a stress diary for two months**

This can help you identify the situations that cause you stress. Record how you reacted to the difficulty that caused you stress and also how you might have been able to avoid the situation.

If you feel the stressful situation could have been avoided then record how and what you will do in the future to help yourself. After the two months, you can use the information you recorded to create an effective stress management plan that is unique to your life and needs.

## **Redefine relationships**

Look at ways you might be able to redefine family, social and work relationships, maybe exchanging one responsibility and area of control for another which is more feasible for you.

## **Consider complementary therapies**

These could include massage, meditation, yoga, t'ai chi or aromatherapy.

## **Exercise**

This can be a very useful tool in managing stress. Using your body helps to let off steam, releasing stress and anxiety. Exercise also helps with sleep and can give you more energy, both of which can help reduce your stress levels.

## **Find ordinary everyday activities that are enjoyable to you.**

Find activities not associated with the things which cause you stress – perhaps taking a walk, sitting outside and hearing the birds and the breeze, listening to music, reading or gardening. Or, in the words of the old saying: stop and smell the roses.

## **Teach yourself relaxation and calm breathing techniques**

You can buy CDs and books to help you with this, or ask an MS nurse, doctor or other health care professional.

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