“Stress has been a major problem in my life. I didn’t realize that I could manage it until I started looking at the different strategies for coping with stress. I make sure to take time out of my week to do something creative with my kids. I also really like using breathing exercises when I am preparing for something stressful or am just feeling overwhelmed.”

— STACIA, mom, wife, friend, person in recovery from co-occurring disorders
The Stress-Vulnerability Model
of Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders

**Recovery Skills**
- Pursuit of goals
- Knowledge of mental illness and substance use
- Healthy lifestyle
- A plan for staying well and preventing relapses

**Stress**

**Biological Vulnerability**

**Coping Skills**
for stress and symptoms

**Social Support**

**Mental Illness and relapse of symptoms**

**Substance Use Disorder and relapse of using alcohol or drugs**

**Medication**

**Skills for not using substances**
Questions to get us started:

What kinds of things make you feel stressed?
How do you know when you are under stress?
What has helped you deal with stress in the past?
What can you do to feel less stress?

You will have the opportunity to discuss these questions and more in this module about coping with stress.

We will cover 4 topics in this Module:

**Topic 1:**
Learning What Contributes to Stress

**Topic 2:**
Identifying Signs of Stress

**Topic 3:**
Preventing and Coping with Stress

**Topic 4:**
Making a Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress

Reminder, set an Agenda:

Here is the format of each Enhanced IMR session:

1. Review the last session
2. Check in on
   - home practice
   - goals
   - substance use
   - symptoms
3. Learn information about a new topic
4. Summarize session and decide on home practice
Topic 1
Learning What Contributes to Stress

Learning effective ways to reduce and cope with stress can make a big difference in your enjoyment of daily life. It can also improve physical and mental wellbeing, and have a positive impact on the symptoms of mental illness and substance use. We will begin by learning more about stress. Then we'll look at situations and events that can cause stress, and learn strategies to help you identify it and cope with it when you are feeling stressed.

Finally, you will use what you learn to create your own Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress. Each topic in this module corresponds to a section of the plan. Working with your E-IMR practitioner, fill in your plan as you read this module. (You will find a blank plan on page 11 of this module.)

In this module, you will:

1. Create your own Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.
2. Learn three relaxation techniques, and one mindfulness technique
3. Have the opportunity to practice the techniques you learn

We encourage you to try using these new tools with your E-IMR practitioner, or with fellow group members. Practice during sessions can improve your ability to use these coping strategies, and increase your confidence for using them on your own.

In today’s session we will learn more about stress and what contributes to it by looking at the following subjects:

💡 What is stress?

💡 How does stress relate to mental illness and substance use?

💡 What makes people feel stressed?
What is stress?

Stress is a natural part of everyone’s life, and everyone experiences stress in some way. Stress can be described as a feeling of pressure, strain, or tension. It is common for people to use phrases like “under stress” or “stressed out” when they are having difficulties in a situation or event.

Here are some important facts about stress:

- Both positive and negative situations can cause stress
- Stress can make symptoms of mental illness or substance use disorders worse
- People can cope effectively with stress by learning skills and strategies

How does stress relate to mental illness and substance use?

Stress can have a big impact on mental illness and substance use disorder. According to the stress-vulnerability model, every person has strengths that help them handle stress better, and weaknesses that make it harder for them to cope. This model also shows that stress is related to developing symptoms of mental illness. Stress can also worsen symptoms, or lead to a relapse of mental illness symptoms.

There is a similar relationship between stress and substance use disorder. Stress has been related to people developing substance use problems. Stress has also been linked to people having a relapse of their substance use. In addition, stress has been related to increased cravings and difficulties in cutting down or stopping substance use. Decreasing stress levels and using effective coping strategies to help manage it better can help you decrease symptoms, and lower the chances of having a relapse.

Keep in mind that stress is a natural part of everyone’s life, and pursuing important personal goals and new challenges may be stressful. Being able to use coping strategies in stressful situations can make you feel more relaxed, and can also help you manage your symptoms.
What makes people feel stressed?

There are many kinds of stress, and different people experience stress differently. We will focus on two main kinds of stress: life events and daily hassles. The goal is to help you to figure out your own personal stressors, and to develop a plan for dealing with them when they come up.

Make It Your Own

Life Events

Life events are big stressors like moving, getting married, or experiencing the death of a loved one. Along with your E-IMR practitioner, review the Life Events Checklist below, and place an X next to the ones you have experienced in the last year. (This checklist will help you fill in Part A of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Event</th>
<th>I experienced this event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a baby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce or separation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury or illness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major financial problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury or illness of a loved one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a loved one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of a crime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting arrested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New responsibilities at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New responsibilities at work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being hospitalized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to detox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s Talk About It

How many life events did you identify?

How did the stressful events that you identified affect the symptoms of your mental illness, or changes in your substance use?
### Make It Your Own

#### Daily Hassles

Daily hassles are the little stressors people experience every day like waiting in long lines, missing the bus, or dealing with an unpleasant person. Unlike life events, these things usually pop up in our day unexpectedly. To see how many daily hassles you have experienced in the last week, review the Daily Hassles Checklist below with your E-IMR practitioner and place an X next to the ones you have experienced. (This checklist will help you fill in Part A of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Hassle</th>
<th>I experienced this event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting in a long line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed the bus/train</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgot wallet/purse at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument at work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with an unpleasant person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting stuck in traffic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too noisy at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too noisy at work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messy kitchen/bathroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household repair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough money to take care of needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough money to do something for fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowded living situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling rushed at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling rushed at work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor medical problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having nothing to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a dangerous neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Let’s Talk About It

How many daily hassles did you identify in the last week?

How did the stressful events that you identified affect the symptoms of your mental illness, or changes in your substance use?
Relaxation strategies

Relaxation strategies can help you cope with stress, and reduce some of its negative impacts. Each topic of this module has Try it Out sections to help you explore a relaxation strategy that helps people reduce the effects of stress in their lives. You may choose to use some of these strategies to fill in Part E, Relaxation Strategies, of your plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.

The relaxation strategy in this topic focuses on breathing. The goal of relaxed breathing is to slow down your breathing. This can slow down your heart rate, and make your body feel calm.

Try it Out

Relaxed Breathing

Practicing can make you feel more confident, and it can help you be more effective in your life.

STEP 1
Review the steps of the skill:

▷ Pick a word that helps you think of relaxation like “calm,” “peace,” or “relax.”

▷ Breathe in normally through your nose, and out slowly through your mouth.

▷ During your exhale, say the word you have chosen. Say it slowly so that you can feel your voice in your throat. “c-a-a-a-a-a-a-l-m.” Or you can say the word to yourself.

▷ Pause and count to four before taking your next breath in. (If four counts seems too long, you can try three or two.)

▷ Repeat the steps above ten to fifteen times.

STEP 2
Watch a demonstration of the skill and try it out: your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate the steps of relaxed breathing for you. You and your practitioner can try it out together.

STEP 3
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: how the practice felt to you, what you did well, and how you might do it differently in the future.

STEP 4
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more opportunities to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 5
Try it out on your own: Plan when, where, and with whom you could practice this skill on your own.
Developing your plan to prevent and cope with stress

Now you have the chance to begin working on your own plan to prevent and cope with stress. The plan is divided into these five parts:

**PART A:**
**Stressful Situations** to be aware of (daily hassles and life events)

**PART B:**
**Signs** that I am under stress

**PART C:**
**Healthy Strategies** I can use to prevent stress

**PART D:**
**Coping Strategies** I can use to respond to stress

**PART E:**
**Relaxation and Mindfulness Strategies** I find helpful

Take some time to start your Plan now with your E-IMR practitioner. You can add what you have learned today about important life events and daily hassles that cause you the most stress and to Part A: Stressful Situations to be aware of (daily hassles and life events). Keep this form handy so that you can fill it in as we go through each section in this module.

On the following page, you will find an example of how Robert completed “My Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.” Take some time to review Robert’s plan and how he completed Parts A through E.

After Robert’s plan, you will find a two-page form that you can use to complete your own plan for preventing and coping with stress. Take some time now to start completing your plan with your E-IMR practitioner. On Part A, “Stressful Situations To Be Aware Of” you can add what you have learned today about life events and daily hassles. Keep this form handy throughout this module so that you can fill it in as you go through each topic.

**KEY POINT**
Coping effectively with stress can help you to reduce symptoms and pursue your goals.
Use this example as a reference to help you finalize

**Plan for Preventing and Coping with Stress**

**EXAMPLE:**

**Robert’s Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress**

**PART A:** Stressful situations

Daily Hassles or Life Events to be aware of: Additional Stressful Situations to be aware of:

1. When my bus is late
2. I lost my driver’s license and I don’t have enough money to get it back.

1. When I get really busy at work

**PART B:** Signs

Signs that I am under stress including physical, emotional, cognitive, or behavioral signs:

1. I clench my jaw and my heart beats really fast.
2. I have a hard time focusing at work and I feel worried.
3. I smoke a lot of cigarettes.

**PART C:** Healthy strategies

Healthy Strategies I can use to prevent stress, such as an exercise routine, cooking with more fruits and vegetables, regular check-ups with my doctor, or regularly scheduled activities for fun:

1. Writing in my journal daily.
2. Practicing positive self-talk every morning.
3. Walking 3-4 times a week around the block.

**PART D:** Coping strategies

Coping Strategies I can use to respond to stress including responding to daily hassles or life events such as talking to a supportive person or positive self-talk:

1. Talking to my practitioner about my worries.
2. Using the nicotine gum when I notice I am smoking a lot.
3. Starting a savings account to help get my license back and save for unexpected things.

**PART E:** Relaxation and mindfulness strategies

Relaxation Strategies I find helpful, such as relaxed breathing, muscle relaxation imagining a peaceful scene, or meditation:

1. Practicing muscle relaxation to relieve the tension
2. Using relaxed breathing when I notice that I am feeling stressed
Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress

Use this form to create your own Plan for Preventing and Coping with Stress. As you complete the activities in Topics 1–4 of this Module, record your answers in the corresponding sections below.

**PART A:**
Stressful Situations to be aware of:

1. _______________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________________

Additional Stressful Situations to be aware of:

1. _______________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________

**PART B:**
Sign that I am under stress including physical, emotional, cognitive, or behavioral signs

1. _______________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________________
PART C:
Healthy Strategies I can use to prevent stress, such as an exercise routine, cooking with more fruits and vegetables, regular check-ups with my doctor, or regularly scheduled activities for fun:

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________

PART D:
Coping Strategies including responding to daily hassles or life events such as talking to a supportive person or positive self-talk or getting some exercise:

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________

PART E:
Relaxation strategies and mindfulness, such as relaxed breathing, muscle relaxation imagining a peaceful scene, or meditation:

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________
Home Practice

Learning what contributes to stress

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:** Track your daily hassles over the next week to identify which events are stressful, how often these hassles happen, and how stressed you feel when they happen.

**OPTION 2:** Practice the relaxed breathing exercise over the next week. If possible, practice with another person and talk about your experiences.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- **What I will do**
- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**
KEY POINTS • Topic 1

Learning What Contributes to Stress

Stress is a feeling of pressure, strain, or tension that comes from dealing with challenging situations.

Life events and daily hassles are both sources of stress.

Coping effectively with stress can help you to reduce symptoms and pursue your goals.
Learning to identify signs of stress is the first step in coping with it better. Everyone feels stress differently, so it is important to know how it feels for you. This knowledge will help you fill out Part B (signs that I am under stress) of your Plan, so be sure to have your form handy.

In today’s session we will explore five key aspects of identifying signs of stress:

- **The mind body connection**
- **Signs of stress in the body**
- **Signs of stress in the mind (thoughts and feelings)**
- **Signs of stress in behavior**
- **Developing your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress**

**KEY POINT**

Three common responses to stress: Fight, Flight, or Freeze

---

**The mind body connection**

The mind and the body are connected. When people are under stress, it affects them physically, emotionally, and behaviorally. It also affects their thinking and concentration.

There are three common ways that your body responds to stress when experiencing a perceived threat: FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE. Think about how you and your body have responded to stress in the past. After you read the following scenario, decide which of the reactions listed below it best describes how you usually respond to a stressful event:

You are walking down a dark street alone. You hear a loud noise, and when you turn around you see a threatening-looking stranger. How do you react? Do you:

- Feel flushed, feel your heart racing, and feel yourself prepare for a fight? Maybe you want to yell at the stranger, but you don’t actually do it?
- Feel like your heart is going to stop, begin sweating, and feel an intense urge to run? Like you are ready for flight?
- Freeze, hold your breath, become very aware of all that is around you, and hope that the person doesn’t notice you? Maybe you feel like there is no chance of escape?
Let's Talk About It

Think about a stressful event that you have experienced in the past, what type of stress was it?

Did you respond to that stressful event with a flight, fight, or freeze response?

What else did you notice about your response to this stressful event? What were you thinking? How you were feeling?

Signs of stress in the body

Signs of stress in the body are often the ones people notice most easily, such as sweating or a rapid heartbeat. Other important physical signs like headaches or trouble sleeping may not be as easy for people to recognize as being connected to stress. Knowing about signs of stress in the body can help you monitor, and then manage your stress level better.

Make It Your Own

Physical Signs of Stress

See the list of common physical signs of stress to the right. Put an X next to the ones you have experienced, and a note about what was it you were stressed about. (This checklist will help you fill in Part B, Signs that I am Under Stress, or your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Sign of Stress</th>
<th>I have noticed this sign</th>
<th>What I was stressed about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty falling asleep</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased need for sleep</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweating or feeling hot</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid heartbeat</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trembling or shaking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back pain</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in appetite</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clenching fists</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaw clenching</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomachache</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry mouth</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other physical signs:</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Signs of stress in the mind (thoughts and feelings)

People can notice signs of stress in their feelings, sometimes called emotional signs of stress. Other signs can be related to thinking and concentration, also known as the cognitive signs of stress.

### Cognitive or Emotional Signs of Stress

I have noticed this sign

What I was stressed about

Problems concentrating

Slow thinking

Difficulty completing tasks

Forgetfulness

Irritability

Anxiousness

Feeling sad or tearful

Feeling worried

Other cognitive or emotional signs:

---

**TOPIC 2**

**Identifying Signs of Stress**

**Make It Your Own**

**Signs of Stress in Thinking and Feelings**

Below is a list of common cognitive and emotional signs of stress. Put an X next to the ones you have experienced, and a note about what was it you were stressed about. (This checklist will help you fill in Part B of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.)

**KEY POINT**

Stressful situations are often known to have an effect on a person’s emotions and it is also true that stress can have an effect on a person’s thinking.
Signs of stress in behavior

Some signs of stress can be noticed in your behaviors or actions.

**Make It Your Own**

**Signs of Stress in Behavior**

Below is a list of common behavioral signs of stress, put an X next to the ones you have experienced, and a note about what was it you were stressed about. (This checklist will help you fill in Part B of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Signs of Stress</th>
<th>I have noticed this sign</th>
<th>What I was stressed about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accident proneness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using alcohol or drugs or wanting to use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty sitting still</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguing or Fighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being late</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking risks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor eating habits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biting nails</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other behavioral signs:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let’s Talk About It

Looking at the checklists above, what did you identify as your signs of stress?

What signs of stress have you noticed in the past week?

Are there any other signs of stress that you have noticed besides the ones listed in the checklists on the previous pages. You can list them below:

______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________

Relaxation Strategies

Relaxation strategies can help you cope with stress, and reduce some of its negative impacts. The strategy in this topic is “Muscle Relaxation.” The goal of this exercise is to gently stretch your muscles to reduce stiffness and tension. The practice starts at your shoulders and works down to your feet. You can practice this while sitting in a chair. If you are uncomfortable, try to change your position and move in a way that will not cause pain.

Try it Out

Muscle Relaxation

Practicing makes you feel more confident, and it can help you achieve your goals.

STEP 1

Review the steps of the skill:

■ Shoulder shrugs: lift both shoulders in a shrugging motion. Try to touch your ears with your shoulders. Hold your shoulders up for a moment. Feel the tension. Let your shoulders drop down after each shrug. Feel the relaxation. Repeat three to five times.

■ Overhead arm stretches. Raise both arms straight above your head. Interlace your fingers, like you’re making a basket, with your palms face down (toward the floor). Stretch your arms toward the ceiling. Hold the position for a moment. Feel the...
tension. Then keeping your fingers interlaced, rotate your palms to face upward (toward the ceiling). Stretch toward the ceiling. Hold the position for a moment. Feel the tension. Repeat three to five times. Notice the feeling of relaxation when you return your arms to your sides.

- **Stomach muscle relaxation:** Pull your stomach muscles toward your back as tightly as you can tolerate. Feel the tension and hold on to it for ten seconds. Then let go of the muscles and let your stomach relax. Focus on the release from the tension. Notice the heavy, yet comfortable sensation in your stomach. Repeat three to five times.

- **Knee raises:** Reach down and grab your right knee with one or both hands. Pull your knee up toward your chest (as close to your chest as is comfortable). Hold your knee there for a few seconds before returning your foot to the floor. Then do the same with your left knee. Notice the tension when you are holding up your knee and the release when you lower it. Repeat the sequence three to five times.

- **Foot and ankle rolls:** Lift your feet and stretch your legs out. Rotate your ankles and feet three to five times in one direction, then three to five times in the other direction. Notice the tension when you are rotating your ankles, and the release when you have completed the rolls and have returned your feet to the floor.

---

**STEP 2**
Watch a demonstration of the skill and Try it out: your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate the steps of muscle relaxation for you. You and your practitioner can try it out together.

**STEP 3**
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: how the practice felt to you, what you did well, and how you might do it differently in the future.

**STEP 4**
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more opportunities to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

**STEP 5**
Try it out on your own: Plan when, where, and with whom you could practice this skill on your own.
Home Practice
Identifying Signs of Stress

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:** Find time over the next week to practice muscle relaxation when you are not feeling stress. Then when you are feeling stress, you will be prepared!

**OPTION 2:** Review the signs of stress checklists you filled out in this session and write down any additional signs you notice.

---

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- When
- Where
- With whom

---

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- What I will do
- When
- Where
- With whom
KEY POINTS • Topic 2

Identifying Signs of Stress

There are three common responses to stress; Fight, Flight, or Freeze.

When people are under stress, the signs often show up in the body.

Stressful situations are often known to have an effect on a person’s emotions and it is also true that stress can have an effect on a person’s thinking.

People often change their behavior in response to stressful situations.
Topic 3
Preventing and Coping with Stress

Now that you have learned more about what stress is and how to recognize it in yourself, it’s time to look at ways to manage it more effectively. There are two main helpful strategies for managing stress. The first type of strategy is aimed at preventing stress. The second type is aimed at reducing stress. The strategies you explore in today’s session will help you fill in Part C (Healthy Strategies I can use to respond to stress) of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress, so be sure to have it handy.

Today’s session will focus on:

💡 Strategies for preventing and coping with stress
💡 Developing your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress

KEY POINT
Preventing and coping more effectively with stress allows you to focus on achieving your goals
# Make It Your Own

## Strategies to Prevent and Cope with Stress

You can use many different strategies to prevent stress, or cope more with it more effectively. The table below lists some common strategies that people have used to deal with stress. Review each strategy with your E-IMR practitioner, and discuss whether or not you have tried it, how helpful it was, or if you would like to try that strategy in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Example of using this strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Being aware of your common stressors helps you better avoid stressful situations.</td>
<td>If you notice that you are more easily stressed by other people in the mornings, you may want to schedule your errands for the afternoon.</td>
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<td>Scheduling time for fun and relaxation helps improve your mood and allows you to better cope with stress.</td>
<td>Doing something you enjoy such as taking a nature walk, going to a movie, or playing music is like filling up your gas tank with coping fuel.</td>
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<td>Developing a support system ensures you have people to turn to when stress is high.</td>
<td>Spending time with people such as family members, friends, peers, or members of your religious or spiritual group helps you become more mentally and physically healthy. Try making a plan for getting together with a friend or family member every week.</td>
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<td>Taking care of your health helps you avoid stress caused by physical illness or untreated health problems.</td>
<td>Eating well, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, and avoiding alcohol and drugs are all ways to prevent and cope with stress more effectively.</td>
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<td>Talking about your feelings or writing them down in a journal keeps them from building up and causing more stress.</td>
<td>Holding in negative feelings can be very stressful. Talking to a supportive person about your feelings gives you an outlet to share what you are going through. Talking about positive feelings can also help you feel positive longer. Some people find it helpful to keep a journal of their thoughts and feelings.</td>
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*more strategies on next page...*
Using positive self talk reminds you about your strengths and helps you focus on the positive things you have in your life. Give yourself credit for the good things you do and for your talents. As you face challenges, try saying things like “This is hard, but I can do it,” or “Taking this one step at a time works for me.”

Maintaining a sense of humor can help reduce stress and make life happier. Laughter can relieve stress. Make a list of things that make you laugh such as a joke book, watching funny YouTube videos, or reading a cartoon. Try a suggestion from your list the next time you feel stressed. Try to pick something from that list every day.

Practicing your communication skills can help you prevent stress caused by conflict, or cope with it when it happens. Make a point of expressing positive feelings to someone every day. Look for opportunities to make requests in a positive way, and to listen to others.

Engaging in spiritual or religious practice helps many people find meaning and calmness. For some people this means attending a religious service. For other people it means going for a walk in nature. Make a plan to do something that feels spiritual to you every week.

Getting regular exercise and doing something physical can help you feel better in both mind and body. Find a physical activity you enjoy and do it regularly—perhaps three times a week. Consider finding an exercise buddy, so you will engage in the activity more often.

Getting creative is a helpful way to avoid or deal with stress by having an outlet to express yourself. Playing music, listening to music from your favorite playlist, drawing, painting, or doing crafts are all ways to be creative. Other ideas include gardening, woodworking, knitting, or participating in other hobbies.

Practicing yoga, meditation, or mindfulness can help build the ability to notice what is going on in our minds and bodies. If you are new to yoga, meditation, or mindfulness, look for beginner classes. You can try out different types of approaches to find what works best for you.

Other helpful strategies:
Make It Your Own
Planning to Prevent and Cope with Stress

Here you can start a plan using one of the strategies to prevent and cope with stress.

How could using a coping strategy for stress help you achieve your goals?
Which coping with stress strategy from the table would you like to try?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

Make a list of things you might need to do before trying the strategy, such as buying art supplies to begin painting, or purchasing a journal to begin writing down your feelings, or looking online to locate a yoga or meditation class. **Use the lines below to make your list:**

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

**Try out the coping strategy with your practitioner.**
How did that go? Would you like to try it again?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

**Make a plan to try out your strategy before the next session:**
Where you could practice the strategy.

___________________________________________________________________

When you could practice the strategy

___________________________________________________________________

Who could practice the strategy with you.

___________________________________________________________________
Relaxation strategies

Relaxation strategies can help you cope with stress, and reduce some of its negative impacts. The strategy here is “imaging a peaceful scene.” The goal of this exercise is to shift your mind away from stress and picture yourself in a more relaxed and calm situation.

Try it Out

Imagining a peaceful scene

Practicing makes people feel more confident, and it can help you be more effective in your life.

STEP 1

Review the steps of the skill:

Choose a scene that you find peaceful, calming, and restful. If you would like some help choosing, here are some options;

- Lying on the beach
- Taking a walk in the woods
- Sitting on a park bench
- Walking a mountain path
- Looking out over a city from the top of a building
- Being on a farm with animals
- Eating your favorite meal

After choosing a scene, imagine as many details about it as possible using all of your senses: sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste.

What does the scene look like?

Is it light or dark? What colors and shapes do you see? What types of plants and trees are there? Are there animals? What buildings do you see? Are there vehicles?

What sounds do you hear in your scene?

Can you hear water or waves? Are there birds chirping or other animal noises? Can you hear the breeze? Are there other people talking?

What can you feel using your sense of touch?

Are you sitting on something soft or hard? Can you feel the air on your skin? Can you feel the sun shining on your face?

What smells are in your peaceful scene?

Does the ocean smell of fish and salt? Do you smell the moss in the woods or flowers in the meadow? The smell of hay on the farm? Is there food cooking somewhere in your scene?

Continued on next page...
What do you taste?
Can you imagine the taste of your favorite meal? Does being on the beach taste of salt?

Try to let any other thoughts that come up pass on in your scene, like a leaf floating down a stream or a cloud drifting by in the sky. Don’t fight these thoughts. Just notice them and let them go, returning your attention to the details of your scene.

Try to focus on the scene for 5 minutes.

STEP 2
Watch a demonstration of the skill and try it out: your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate the steps of imagining a peaceful scene for you. You and your practitioner can try it out together.

STEP 3
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: how the practice felt to you, what you did well, and how you might do it differently in the future.

STEP 4
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more opportunities to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 5
Try it out on your own: Plan when, where, and with whom you could practice this skill on your own.

KEY POINT
Using relaxed breathing, muscle relaxation, and imagining a peaceful scene can help you prevent and cope with stress.
Home Practice
Preventing and Coping with Stress

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:**
Practice the strategy to prevent and cope with stress you planned during today’s session.

**OPTION 2:**
Practice a relaxation strategy. Imagine a peaceful scene, and then describe it to a friend.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- **What I will do**
- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

The step you will work on

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**

“*You have to practice something to make it your own!***”
KEY POINTS • Topic 3

Preventing and Coping with Stress

Preventing and coping more effectively with stress allows you to focus on achieving your goals.

Using relaxed breathing, muscle relaxation, and imagining a peaceful scene can help you prevent and cope with stress.
Topic 4
Making a Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress

The final topic of this module will help you complete Part E of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress. Part E involves listing the relaxation and mindfulness strategies that you can use to deal with stress. This topic includes a mindfulness strategy called “sitting meditation” that you may want add to Part E.

In today’s session we will cover the following three subjects helpful in coping with stress:

💡 Sitting meditation

💡 Success stories for coping with stress

💡 Completing Your Plan for Preventing and Coping with Stress

Relaxation strategies

Relaxation strategies can help you cope with stress, and reduce some of its negative impacts. The strategy in Topic 4 is “sitting mindfulness.” It helps you turn your attention inward and develop a stronger, clearer, and calmer mind. Sitting meditation is an ancient practice still used today. Give it a try to see if it works for you. The goal of this exercise is to shift your focus to your breath and your current state of being. This is a simple exercise, but it can be challenging at times, especially when you begin. Be patient and gentle with yourself. There is a reason we call it practice!

Try it Out

Sitting meditation

Practicing makes you feel more confident, and it can help you achieve your goals.

STEP 1
Review the steps of the skill:

Find a comfortable seat with both feet on the floor. Try to sit so that you are not leaning on the back of your seat if it has one. Sit up straight, but not stiffly. Allow your arms to rest at your sides or in your lap.
Your eyes can be closed or open with a soft gaze. Relax the muscles in your face and jaw, allowing your mouth to open a little bit and your tongue to fall away from the roof of your mouth.

Allow yourself to notice how your body feels in this posture.

Now shift your attention to your breath. As you allow the breath to flow in through your mouth or your nose, notice how it feels. Don’t try to change the breath, simply experience the sensations that breathing creates in your body.

You will notice thoughts coming into your mind, taking your focus from the breath. This is common. Our brains are supposed to do this. Noticing that this happens is what meditation is all about!

When thoughts come into your mind, allow yourself to be curious about them before letting them go and refocusing your attention on your breath. Try to label these thoughts by saying (silently in your mind) “I am having a thought” before letting it go.

It can also help to label emotions and stress in this way by saying (silently in your mind) “stress is present” before allowing the feeling to pass and refocusing on your breath.

Practice sitting meditation as long as you like. It is often helpful to start with short meditations of two to five minutes and gradually increase the time as you become more comfortable. There are many free apps with meditation timers to help you keep track of your meditation practice.

STEP 2
Watch a demonstration of the skill and try it out: your E-IMR practitioner will demonstrate the steps of relaxed breathing for you. You and your practitioner can try it out together.

STEP 3
Get feedback: After you try it out, your E-IMR practitioner will guide a discussion about: how the practice felt to you, what you did well, and how you might do it differently in the future.

STEP 4
Continue practice and feedback: Your E-IMR practitioner will help set up more opportunities to try it out if needed. After each practice, your practitioner will guide a review.

STEP 5
Try it out on your own: Plan when, where, and with whom you could practice this skill on your own.
Success stories for coping with stress

Everyone experiences stress in different ways and everyone finds different coping strategies helpful. Having a personal plan to cope with stress is very important. You have been working on your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress already during this module. To help you complete your Plan, here are some examples from other people that describe stressful situations and how they cope with them. Their stories may help you think about ways to update or strengthen your plan to cope with stress.

**ANTWON**

“Recently I’ve been under stress because my mother has been ill. In the past I would go out with my friends to smoke weed. But now I am determined not to smoke weed anymore. I like visiting my mother every day, but it makes me feel tense. I talk to my sister on the phone every night and it helps a lot. I also try to do something relaxing in the evening to take my mind off Mom’s illness such as going to a self-help meeting at my church. If it’s not too dark, I take a walk in the neighborhood. Or, I might read a travel magazine or watch a nature show on TV. It helps me feel more calm and fall asleep more easily.”

**STEPHANIE**

“I feel tense when there is a lot of noise. I try to avoid those kinds of situations. But there are times when it’s unavoidable, like at my apartment. I have roommates, and sometimes they watch television shows or make noise when they are cooking dinner. I like my roommates, and I don’t think they are being excessive. Noise is just part of having roommates.

It helps me to take a break and go to my room. I like to use my headphones and listen to music or a relaxation CD. It drowns out the noise from the apartment and takes me to a quieter place. Sometimes I imagine a peaceful scene, like taking a ride in a canoe. Later I feel like going out to join my roommates in whatever they’re doing.”

**LEE**

“For me, it’s very stressful to rush to get somewhere on time. I start to feel anxious and irritable. Sometimes I even get a craving to smoke marijuana, too. I try to plan ahead as much as possible and allow myself plenty of time. On the nights before I go to work, I lay out my clothing for the next day. I get up at least an hour before I have to leave the house to catch the bus and practice sitting meditation. When I feel a craving and then practice sitting meditation, I notice that the craving passes after a few minutes. Then I

Continued on next page...
don’t feel anxious. I can relax on my way to work and start the day feeling fresh. Every night when I get home, I do some muscle relaxation to wind down from my day.

Of course, I can’t plan for everything. Sometimes there’s bad traffic on the way to work. When I feel myself starting to get irritable, I do some relaxed breathing to slow myself down. Sometimes I also use positive self-talk. I tell myself, I have an excellent record at work of arriving on time and doing my job well.

Let’s Talk About It

What things in the stories are similar to yours?

What coping strategies could you use to manage stressful situations like the ones in the stories?

Completing your plan to prevent and cope with stress

In each topic of this module you have tried a different relaxation strategy or a mindfulness strategy. Think about which of these strategies were helpful for you and work together with your E-IMR practitioner to complete the final section of your plan, Part E: Relaxation and Mindfulness Strategies on page 174.

Your Plan is almost complete. Now is the time to look over each section to see if it contains everything you want. Use the example of Robert’s Plan found on page 172 to help you as you review your Plan. Discussing this example with your E-IMR practitioner alongside your own Plan will help ensure you haven’t left anything out.

Let’s Talk About It

Which stressors in the example plan are like yours? Which are different?

What did you like about this example plan?

What things would you change in this plan?
Recovery Corner

"I'M A PEER SPECIALIST AND WORK for a substance abuse program where most of the people have co-occurring disorders. I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and am in recovery from cocaine and alcohol addiction.

When I stopped drinking and using cocaine, I knew I wanted to help other people like me. I needed a year of sobriety before I could enroll in a peer specialist program, and that first year of recovery was very stressful. It's hard to stay on track if you don't have effective strategies for dealing with stress. Fortunately, I had a sober support network that helped and encouraged me. I achieved one year of sobriety, and enrolled in a peer specialist program for my certification.

In my work, I share my recovery story with people who come to the treatment program. My main job is to help people develop an aftercare plan that will give them the best shot at staying sober. I love my job, but there can be a lot of stress. Every day I take a walk and play with my cat, which helps reduce my stress. Talking about things with another colleague who has had experiences similar to mine is one of the best ways of coping with stress. Having someone to talk to when I’m having a bad day allows me to cope with my stress, and continue to do a good job at work. Helping people get into recovery is an incredibly rewarding experience for me. I’m glad I have good strategies for coping with the stress involved in my work."

— Samantha
Home Practice

Making a Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:**
Share your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress with a supportive person over the next week.

**OPTION 2:**
Practice sitting meditation for two to five minutes each day over the next week. Find a quiet part of your day and a place where you can practice.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

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<th>What I will do</th>
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Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

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KEY POINT
Developing a plan to prevent and cope with stress can help you reduce symptoms and work toward achieving your goals.

Make It Your Own
Review your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress

Now that you have filled in most of your Plan to Prevent and Cope with Stress, take a moment to review it with your E-IMR practitioner. Is there anything you would like to update, expand, or change? Is there any new information you can add to your Plan? Also think about a family member or a supportive person you could share it with. Take some time now to finish anything left on your Plan.
Everyone has different sources of stress and coping strategies that work for them.

Developing a plan to prevent and cope with stress can help you reduce symptoms and work toward achieving your goals.