

Reducing Stress and Beating Burnout

Living in today's fast-paced world isn't always easy. Add the unique factors of serving in a national service program - such as budgeting around a living stipend, settling into a new position and service environment (maybe even a new state!) - and sometimes it all can seem a bit overwhelming.

Some things in life are out of our control; the way in which we respond to stress doesn't have to be one of them. Here are some strategies for reducing stress and beating burnout.

Do something you enjoy. Make time for a favorite activity or hobby, like gardening, cooking or reading. These simple pleasures can help you relax and recharge.

Get support from other members. Connect, share ideas, solve problems and benefit from the experience of others who are in a situation similar to yours. There are many Facebook groups maintained by current members and alums—there may even be one in your area! Plus, keep an eye out for blogs written by members about their AmeriCorps experience, and connect by posting a response.

Check these out:

- [Seattle AmeriCorps Collaborative](#)
- [SW WA AmeriCorps](#)
- [Serve Spokane](#)

Exercise regularly. Exercise can improve your mood, boost your energy level and promote better sleep. **TIP:** many fitness and YMCA centers will offer a discounted rate for AmeriCorps members - just ask!

Managing Stress Effectively

The person who effectively resists stress embodies four qualities:

- Looks at problems positively, as challenges to be met
- Has personal goals that are well defined
- Engages in a sensible lifestyle that includes regular exercise and a method of relaxation
- Is socially involved with others

Regular stress-reduction techniques will:

- Boost your immunity
- Improve your outlook
- Allow you to exercise a sense of control amid chaos
- Make your life a lot more pleasurable!

Eat a healthy diet. Coffee, soft drinks and sugary snacks provide a temporary boost but often lead to a crash in your mood and energy level. Instead, eat fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nonfat yogurt and cheese. Be sure to stay hydrated by drinking water throughout the day.

Adjust expectations. If you often feel overwhelmed, you may be trying to do too much. Prioritize your "to do" list and focus on the most important tasks.

Put yourself first. By definition, serving in a national service program invariably means that members put others' needs before their own. However, be sure to make time for yourself each day so you can be at your best when others need your support the most.

Get inspired! Create an inspiration album or "wall". Include thank-you notes from people you've helped, student artwork, photographs, inspiring quotes, kudos from colleagues and supervisor, and a list of the reasons you became an AmeriCorps member.

Practice stress-relief techniques such as journal-writing or meditation. Use them to prevent and cope with daily stress.

Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths. ~ ETTY HILLESUM

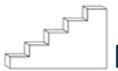


Steps to Stress Management



Use laughter as medicine.

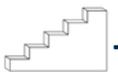
- Laugh! Laughter may be one of the healthiest antidotes to stress.
- Be a social animal. Spend time with friends and family. Nothing is worse for us when we are stressed than to spend time in isolation.
- Think positive.
- Be decisive and assertive.
- Slow down. Moving, talking and behaving in a relaxed manner can cut the stress response.



Make your service work for you.

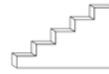
People are generally happiest when they:

- Find meaning in their service.
- Are able to successfully integrate their family and community life with their service.



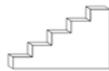
Thrive on challenge.

- Acknowledge the fact that the world is constantly changing.
- Reframe problems. See them as a puzzle or a game. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn.
- Distinguish between solvable problems and unresolvable predicaments. If it's a problem, get down to work. If it's a predicament that is out of your control, realize you have to create new ways to cope with the situation.
- Set short-term goals and prioritize them. Setting goals allows you to focus on the step-by-step process of facing challenges.



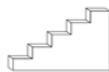
Eat for performance.

- Take time out for meals. Missing meals saps your body of energy and increases the effects of stressful situations.
- Eat breakfast!
- Eat protein for mental alertness. Make lunch high in protein to stay energized throughout the afternoon.
- Avoid sugars and fats. Sugars intensify the stress reaction by releasing epinephrine and acting as sedatives. Fats actually steal energy from you.



Exercise.

- Start with aerobic exercise. Walking, running, biking and other aerobic exercise serve as a natural stress reducer.
- Use whatever time you have. If you can only spare 15 minutes, make the best of it.
- Make it fun. Vary your activities, listen to music, exercise with friends, try yoga or go hiking.



Manage your time.

- Define how you take charge of your time and space.
- Sharpen your time management skills. Use the time you have beneficially to reach your goals. Get out that planner.
- Live by lists. Make lists of daily tasks and activities. Use it as your guide.
- Take time away when you need it. You don't have to save the world today or do it all yourself.
- Get enough sleep. The average adult needs seven to eight hours per night.



Information contained herein was taken from excerpts from "The National Service Stress Survival Guide" by Education Northwest and "How to Reduce Stress and Beat Burnout" from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Self-care is the act of taking care of yourself. Establishing self-care habits is an important part of living a healthy and happy life. All of the strategies you read about in the article “Reducing Stress and Beating Burnout” are examples of self-care habits.

1. List the self-care habits you are using now to manage stress and stay healthy:

I get at least 8 hours of sleep each night.

I . . .

- a.
- b.
- c.

2. List the self-care habits you would like to use, but are not currently practicing:

I want to take a regular yoga class.

I want to . . .

- a.
- b.
- c.

3. Identify the obstacles keeping you from practicing these habits:

I am not taking a yoga class now because I feel like I don't have the time and I think it might be too expensive.

I am not _____ because . . .

- a.
- b.
- c.

(continued on page 2)

4. What solutions can you come up with to address the obstacles you listed?

I could look for discounted or free yoga classes. I could free up time for myself by cutting back on my volunteer work, asking my neighbor to watch my children after school once a week, and sharing the cooking responsibilities with my family.

I could . . .

- a.

- b.

- c.

5. Take a moment to reread the self-care habits you wrote down for item 2. Select one of the habits you would like to begin practicing and complete the sentences below.

Today, I commit to taking a weekly yoga class. I want to do this because I want to improve my flexibility, learn a new skill, and have some time for myself each week. I will accomplish this by finding and enrolling in a free or low-cost class and by easing up on my commitments and asking for help from others.

Today, I commit to . . .

I want to do this because . . .

I will accomplish this by . . .