Tools for stress reduction and resiliency

Smartphones, digital pedometers, and a multitude of applications (apps) that can help bust through stress, build resiliency, and keep us mentally healthy are readily available. Which ones rise to the top? Below are a few useful tools for stress reduction and resiliency.



Nutrition and fitness

Poor nutrition may play a role in increased mental health problems that have emerged over the past 50 years. According to the *Feeding Minds* study, increases in schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease, and attention deficit disorder could be linked to changing food consumption patterns. On the positive side, exercise has long been thought to enhance mental fitness – but we could all use a little motivation, both to get moving and eat healthier foods!

Interested in making a change? Great! Setting goals and tracking success have been shown to be key motivators in achieving better outcomes. Today's technology makes it easy to track everything from calories, fibre and sodium consumption to steps, heart rate and more. Consider investing in a wireless activity tracker and a nutrition app. Wireless activity trackers are considered the modern pedometers of today – you can download the accompanying app and have your real-time data sync right to your mobile device! A couple to try are Fitbit and MyFitnessPal.

Stress reduction

Simple stress reduction techniques, such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, have been used for decades to help people relax and clear their minds. Today, these proven techniques are at your fingertips – through apps available directly on your mobile device. Feeling stressed? Having apps on hand when you need them could help you battle stress before you become overwhelmed. How can your favourite digital device transform into a quick and convenient anti-stress remedy?

- **Online games.** Redirect your focus away from the source of stress and try to concentrate on a short game that engages your mind *and body*, thus helping to reduce your stress while squeezing in a fun workout!
- **Online support groups.** With countless online groups composed of people working through personal struggles and learning new coping mechanisms, sharing with those who have faced similar issues is just a click away.
- **Online stress management programs.** For convenience, privacy and a more structured digital experience, try LifeWorks's Stress Coach Connects. Assess your level of stress, understand your triggers and make meaningful behavioural changes to better manage it, through proven clinical stress management techniques.
- **Social media.** Whether you're a frequent poster, a reluctant participant or just a browser, you can put social media to work for you to reduce your stress level. You can browse beautiful image pins on Pinterest or find a funny video on YouTube to ease tension and improve your mood.
- **Mobile apps.** Discover the wide array of apps for your mobile device specifically designed to keep your stress levels under control – whether it's through doodles, serene scenes and sounds, better organizing skills or health and wellness information.

Relaxation and meditation techniques have been proven effective with immediate as well as longer-term stress reduction. Today, you can access apps such as BellyBio (biofeedback and sounds help you master a deep breathing technique) and eCBT Calm (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy concepts that help you evaluate your stress levels and relax). Measure your stress with "My Stress Index" on the award-winning My EAP app, which puts access to professional mental health services at your fingertips too with E-Counseling, First Chat and Online Access.

Other digital diversions

The act of writing often gives us a new perspective on situations, others and ourselves. In fact, research shows that writing down optimistic thoughts and positive memories can be extremely powerful. Some ways of capitalizing on this sense of well-being or fulfillment is through blogging, or a “Gratitude Journal” – now in app form, so you can cultivate happiness anytime and anywhere.

As mentioned above, online single or multiplayer games can also serve as fun stress busters. Apps that challenge your mind and help you blast away stress include: Words with Friends, Sudoku, and Luminosity. Another idea is to download the latest eBook to enjoy during a typically stressful time: the morning or evening commute. You could also create an upbeat playlist to play specifically when you’re feeling down or tired. Finally, one of the simplest tools for reducing stress in your life is already built into your smartphone: the phone! Text or call a friend just to say “hi” and reap the stress-busting benefits of connecting with people you care about.

From fitness and nutrition to journals and health apps, numerous tools are available to help you remain mentally fit. Try one today!