

Coaching higher-activated patients: Stress management



Phreesia

Use this guide to coach higher-activated patients (PAM Levels 3 and 4) on the effects of stress, ways to monitor stress levels and triggers, and tips to integrate stress-relieving activities into their daily lives.

Build knowledge:

Educate the patient on the health effects of stress and how it can be managed.

- Discuss how **chronic, unmanaged stress can affect mental and physical health** and worsen existing health issues. Find out whether the patient has health conditions that may be exacerbated by stress (e.g., cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, drug or alcohol misuse, etc.).
- **Review the difference** between potentially harmful responses to stress—such as physical inactivity, eating junk food and/or smoking—versus health-promoting responses, like getting enough sleep, talking to a friend or going for a walk.
 - Are the patient's typical responses to stress health-promoting? If not, how would it feel to try a health-promoting response the next time they're stressed?
- Remind the patient that during times of stress, it may feel difficult to keep up with healthy habits. Reassure the patient that **this reaction is normal**.

Build skills:

Help the patient anticipate stress triggers and monitor their stress levels.

- Ask the patient to **identify upcoming situations** that could negatively affect their ability to cope with stress, such as a holiday, the anniversary of a death, an upcoming move, the arrival of a new baby or another major life event.
 - Together, **come up with a plan** to proactively manage the anticipated stressors. Remind them to refer to their plan during challenging times or life changes.

Build skills:

Help the patient anticipate stress triggers and monitor their stress levels.

- **Suggest keeping a journal** to help the patient monitor their daily stress levels, triggers, responses and general health status. Ask the patient to pay close attention to how diet, exercise, sleep, relationships, workload, alcohol consumption and other factors affect their stress levels.
 - **Talk with the patient** about times in the past when they maintained their health-promoting behaviors when managing stress. What techniques or skills did they use? Could they use them again?

Build confidence:

Motivate the patient to incorporate stress-relieving activities on a regular basis.

- Together, **brainstorm healthy ways to prevent or reduce stress** that the patient has yet to try. Examples might include going salsa dancing, starting a backyard garden, learning to knit, taking a yoga class or joining a book club.
- **Suggest making lifestyle enhancements** to boost the patient's ability to cope with stress. Examples might include increasing daily physical activity with more balance- and strength-training; searching for recipes online that incorporate seasonal fruits and vegetables; or identifying ways to improve sleep hygiene, such as by reducing caffeine consumption or screen time before bed.
- **Talk about the importance of having positive social interactions** with trusted friends, family and religious or community members to help cope with life's stressors. Emphasize the stress-reducing benefits of volunteering and becoming more engaged in one's community.

