

Coaching lower-activated patients: Stress management

Phreesia



Use this guide to coach lower-activated patients (PAM Levels 1 and 2) on understanding the basics of stress, recognizing stress triggers and responses, and identifying simple and healthy ways to reduce stress.

Build knowledge:

Educate the patient on the basics of stress.

- **Make sure the patient understands** that stress is a state of mental tension caused by a difficult situation. It's the body's natural response to addressing challenges or threats.
 - Explain that it's normal for everyone to experience stress at some points in their lives. However, **chronic or unmanaged stress can lead to new health problems** or make existing health problems worse.
- **Discuss the common physical signs and symptoms** of stress, such as an upset stomach, chest pains, a racing heart, muscle tension, difficulty breathing, sleep problems, hair loss, weight changes and more.
 - Find out whether any of these symptoms pose a problem for the patient right now.
- Remind the patient that during times of stress, it may feel difficult to keep up with new health habits or goals. Reassure the patient that **this reaction is normal**.

Build skills:

Work with the patient to recognize their stress triggers and responses.

- Explain that the causes of stress, or “triggers,” are different for everyone. Getting married or divorced, starting or losing a job, experiencing the death of a loved one or facing financial difficulties are all examples of stress triggers. **Ask the patient to write down a list** of their personal stress triggers.
- **Ask the patient to start paying attention to how they react** to stress. Are their reactions helpful or unhelpful in relieving their stress? Are they health-promoting (e.g., taking a walk, hugging a friend, playing with a pet) or potentially harmful (e.g., under- or over-eating, smoking or vaping, misusing alcohol or drugs)?

Build confidence:

Encourage the patient to identify simple, healthy ways to reduce stress.

- Work with the patient to **create a list of easy and healthy responses to stress**. Examples might include workouts they enjoy, a mindfulness or relaxation technique, snacking on fresh fruit and vegetables or reducing screen time before going to bed.
 - How would it feel to try a new health-promoting response the next time they're stressed?
- **Ask the patient to revisit their lists** of personal stress triggers and health-promoting responses. Do they notice whether their physical and mental symptoms of stress get better, get worse or stay the same when they try a health-promoting stress response versus a potentially harmful stress response?
- **Talk about the benefits** of having a support network, including friends and relatives, religious or community group members, a counselor or other people they trust.
 - How does the patient feel about reaching out to members of their stress support network during difficult times?
- **Reassure the patient** that if their progress toward a health goal slows or stalls because of stress, they don't need to feel discouraged. They can pick up where they left off once they have managed their stress.

