

Coping with Change

•Understanding the benefits of change•Change and stress•Helpful tips on coping with change

Change is a natural part of life. Most of us are continually making adjustments that reflect our changing needs or interests—switching majors in school, moving to another city, or adjusting to a new job. Some changes are known while others are sudden and unexpected, which can be challenging to accept. This article will help you find the best strategy for coping with change—whether planned, unplanned, difficult, or positive—and learn to focus on what you can control while letting go of what you can't.

Understanding the benefits of change

Many people have negative reactions when they first hear that they'll be facing a big change. Some people cry or become angry. Others think, "It isn't fair," "I'll never be able to handle this," or "I'm too old to learn a new way of doing things." It may help to remember that a change—even if you didn't ask for it—can be beneficial.

Change can be rewarding because it...

Provides a chance to learn and grow. New experiences can bring greater knowledge and awareness if you allow them to.

Gives you a new perspective. Sometimes, when you are forced to make choices and decisions, you realize what it is you really value.

Brings new opportunities. Change may be difficult, but it may also bring about unexpected, new opportunities such as meeting new friends or developing new healthy habits.

Helps you stay flexible. It's easy to fall into a rut or become "set in your ways." A change in one area of life can help you stay flexible and may help you make other changes in your life.

Builds self-confidence. Staying in a comfortable situation can be fine for a while. But over time, it can become tedious or cause you to lose confidence in your ability to do well at other tasks or in new settings.

Makes you grow and become stronger. When you accept and successfully cope with a tough change, it will help you become stronger for the next change.

Change and stress

Change can seem very stressful at first, even if it may potentially be rewarding in the long run. There are many kinds of change, and everyone reacts differently—whether it's the birth of a baby, a divorce, or even an upcoming holiday or vacation.

“Stress is just your body's way of reacting to change. It's okay to feel stressed even when something good has happened—in fact, it's normal.”

Stephanie A. Sarkis Ph.D., [*Psychology Today*](#)

Typically, the more significant the change, the more stress you may face. Many people find it particularly difficult to move from one major stage of life to another—for example, leaving school, having a child, reaching midlife, becoming a stepparent or grandparent, or retiring.

Change can be both physically and mentally stressful, so it's important to recognize signs of stress, which may include the following:

- headaches, neck aches, or backaches
- depression
- anxiety
- fatigue
- overeating
- difficulty sleeping
- irritability or mood swings
- poor concentration
- stomachaches or other digestive problems
- alcohol or drug use
- eating disorders
- heart trouble
- changes in sexual drive

Even if you look forward to a change, adjusting to new realities can be stressful. One key to coping with these kinds of difficulties is to remember that, with support, most people can adapt well.

Depending on the nature of the change you face, you may want to turn to your family or friends, your manager or co-workers, a professional counsellor, or a support group whose members know what you're going through and want to help. You can also call your assistance program (EAP) to speak with a counsellor who can support you.

Helpful tips on coping with change

Facing change can be difficult, but with the right attitude and support, you can find the positive in it. Here are some tips on coping with change.

Expect and accept change as part of life. Try to welcome new experiences as potential growth opportunities. Throughout life, keep making friends, exploring a variety of interests and activities, and accepting new challenges at work.

Take care of your physical and emotional health. If you're facing a big change, take extra care to keep a routine, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, and limit your alcohol consumption. Learn and practise some relaxation techniques by taking a yoga class or following a guided meditation online. Take short breaks regularly and make time to do something you find enjoyable with friends or family.

Keep an open mind. Just because you haven't done something before doesn't mean you won't like it. And just because you've tried something once and it didn't turn out as well as expected doesn't mean you'll have the same result next time.

Stay positive. Hold on to your sense of humour. Laughter is a stress buster, and it helps us not take life too seriously. Remember, you have a choice as to how you respond to the changes you face. Keeping a positive attitude will help you through the tough times.

Take it slow. Making a change is really a series of small transitions. You will find it easier to cope with a big change by breaking it down into small steps so that you can make gradual adjustments over time.

Gather information. The most stressful thing about change may be the uncertainty it brings. To ease your anxieties, learn as much as you can about what you're facing. Do research online or at the library. Talk with friends and co-workers who've faced the same kind of changes you're facing and ask what helped them the most. A book you may find helpful is *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, by William Bridges, which describes the stages of change and how to deal with them.

Identify obstacles. Just about everyone encounters obstacles that get in the way of coping with change. Taking the time to write yours down will help you identify and understand your own obstacles. From there, you can work to figure out how to get past the obstacles you may be facing.

Pace yourself. Where possible, avoid taking on more changes before you've adjusted to another one, or trying to make too many smaller changes all at once. If you know that you're already experiencing stress, try to postpone making big decisions that will bring about change and, possibly, more stress.

Talk about your feelings with loved ones who can help. Be as specific as you can about your concerns. You might say to your partner, "I've had more responsibilities at work since I've been promoted, and it's become harder for me to make dinner every night. What can we do about this?" Or you might call up your best friend to talk through your insecurities about parenting a teenager.

Consider joining a support group. If a change feels too big to handle alone, consider joining a support group for people who are going through a similar experience. You can find groups listed in the calendar of events in your local newspaper, by searching online for a national organization devoted to the issue that concerns you, or by asking a counsellor or health professional to suggest group resources.

Seek professional help if you are having difficulty coping with change. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Most people benefit from support and guidance when faced with tough circumstances. Your organization's assistance program (or EAP) or other confidential counselling services available to you can provide you with resources and help.

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