

# Build your resilience

“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.”—Maya Angelou

## What is Resilience?

Resilience – the ability to recover from hardship and difficulties – helps people cope with life’s inevitable stresses. People who are resilient tend to have an optimistic outlook on life. They recognize and accept that many life events are out of their control, but feel capable of handling whatever comes their way. They try to remain flexible and have an open attitude toward change.

Being resilient even has health benefits. People who cope with stress in a positive way tend to live longer, have lower rates of depression, and are more satisfied with their lives than people who do not handle stress well in difficult situations.

## Building Resilience

Throughout life people may feel their resilience diminish depending on their levels of stress. However, everyone can learn to increase their resilience abilities, no matter what their age or background. Unlike personality traits or physical traits such as height and build, resilience is a skill that can be developed with practice.

Tips to boost resilience include the following:

- Focus on health and take good care of the self. The three most important ways to boost overall health are regular exercise, adequate sleep and healthy eating. These three pillars are critical to help the mind and body cope with stress.
- Aerobic exercise, such as walking, running, and swimming, lowers stress levels, ramps up the immune system, and improves heart rate. Try to aim for at least 140 minutes per week of moderate-intensity activity.
- A healthy diet consisting of a variety of foods is essential for a healthy mind and body. Some studies have shown a link between poor nutrition and decreased mental health, with diets high in refined sugar and processed foods and low intake of fish, fruits, and vegetables associated with an increased risk for depression. While there is no one “ideal” diet suitable for everyone, in general try to eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, stick to moderate portions, drink plenty of water, and don’t skip meals.
- Getting enough sleep is essential for good mental and physical health. People who are sleep-deprived are often less able to handle stress, and can have problems with memory, learning new information, and making decisions. Long-term sleep deprivation is also associated with poor immune function and a higher risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep every night.

Being resilient doesn't mean that a person doesn't experience distress during difficult times. Sadness, anger, and emotional pain are normal reactions to traumatic or adverse situations. However, resilient people use different strategies to maintain emotional balance, such as:

- **Connecting with positive people.** Caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family provide encouragement and reassurance. Some people find that being involved in faith-based organizations, civic groups, and other social networks not only helps others, but is beneficial for themselves as well.
- **Making time for fun and rewarding hobbies and activities.** Whether it's gardening, woodworking, or listening to music, doing something every day that one enjoys promotes a positive attitude.
- **Taking decisive actions.** People develop trust and confidence in their own skills and abilities by taking action whenever they can toward their goals. Make realistic plans and carry them out.
- **Maintaining perspective.** Looking at the current situation in the context of a whole lifetime often helps people deal with challenges and not blow things out of proportion.
- **Having a positive view of yourself.** Treat yourself as kindly as you would treat a friend.
- **Learning from other resilient people and steering clear of people whose negativity drains energy and motivation.**

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