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Understanding the causes of psychological distress may help you prevent it and overcome it when it arises.Getty/AnnaStillsHave questions about psychological distress? Ask a licensed mental health expert onlineWhat is psychological or mental distress?While most people experience stress from time to time, psychological distress can have a more profound effect on an individual. Psychological distress can range from mild emotional stress to serious psychological distress that may be a precursor to a mental illness. Still, experiencing psychological distress does not always indicate the presence of a mental health disorder.Experiencing psychological distress can be overwhelming. However, help is available during times of psychological distress. Knowing the right coping skills may help shorten its duration and mitigate long-term effects. What causes psychological distress?Various factors may increase the risk of high levels of psychological distress. For example, work-related stress and job dissatisfaction are key factors related to psychological distress. High work demands, low job satisfaction, and a lack of emotional support can also result in emotional exhaustion and sleep disturbances. Family life and the lack of emotional support at home can also affect an individual's psychological well-being. Losing a loved one or surviving a major natural disaster are other examples of life-changing events that can lead to intense psychological distress. For some, these events might result in moderate psychological distress, while others may experience profound psychological trauma. Some health conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, not only affect physical functioning but can also have a psychological impact, potentially leading to anxiety and depressive symptoms. In addition, lifestyle choices like excessive alcohol consumption or illicit drug use can further affect mental well-being.The effects of psychological distressPsychological distress can cause different symptoms in different people. The cause of the stress and a person's coping mechanisms may determine how they are affected. A person who lives with high levels of psychological distress may experience impaired mental health, followed by an increased risk of developing a mental health disorder. The intensity of distress typically subsides with time. However, when these feelings persist and are accompanied by other symptoms, such as sleeplessness or an uncontrolled reliving of a stressful or traumatic event, a person may be experiencing a stress disorder, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).If you are concerned that you may be experiencing an underlying anxiety or stress disorder, you don't have to face it alone. You can speak with a mental health professional in person or online. They may be able to help you understand why you are experiencing these symptoms and provide an evidence-based treatment plan for your common symptoms of psychological distress.Symptoms of psychological distress can vary, even among people who have experienced the same stressor. However, the following are some common symptoms of psychological distress:Problems with anger managementPhysical symptoms that can't be explained by a medical condition, such as headachesLow energy levelsDecreased cognitive functioningIsolationChanges in eating or sleeping patternsExcessive use of alcohol or other substancesThoughts of hurting oneself or othersOther possible signs of psychological distress may include anxiety, panic attacks, irritability, and tearfulness, which may be seen immediately after a stressful event or when a memory triggers a person.Getty/Overcoming psychological distressUncontrolled psychological distress can affect a person in several ways, but there are strategies to manage and even overcome it. Mental health services are available if you recognize you are experiencing symptoms of psychological distress. A healthcare provider may evaluate symptoms and make an appropriate diagnosis based on general health questionnaires, mental health evaluations, and other factors. Once you have seen a physician, there are other things you can do to help relieve psychological distress, including:ExerciseResearch shows that the benefits of exercise are both physical and psychological. Psychological benefits associated with exercise include stress reduction and improved mood due to the release of endorphins, which are also known as the body's "feel good" neurotransmitters. Avoid prolonged sitting at workOne cross-sectional study involving an employed adult population highlighted the mental health challenges linked with prolonged sitting at work. Men and women who sat for more than 6 hours a day experienced higher levels of psychological distress. Balancing periods of activity with restful breaks at work may improve mental health and reduce sickness absence, ultimately promoting more positive feelings among the workforce.Develop patterns of activity balanced with adequate sleepSleep deprivation can contribute to anxiety and mental distress. An article by Harvard Health Publishing states that the overlap between sleep disorders and various mental health problems is thought to be so strong that researchers have long suspected both types of concerns may have common biological causes. While exercise and activity have been shown to be important for your health, it can be just as important to balance activity with sleep. Good sleep gives your body a chance to recover from daily activities and stress. Sleep gives your heart a chance to rest, keeps your immune system functioning optimally, and allows you to form long-term memories.Nourishing dietEven in our health-conscious society, many people do not realize the effects of diet on mood. A lack of adequate nutrition may affect mood and energy. For example, certain nutrients in foods and diets have been linked to improvement in symptoms of depression. When stress levels are already a concern, the effect of poor nutrition can compound the distress.Getty/Vadym PastukhHave questions about psychological distress? Ask a licensed mental health expert onlineJournalingResearch shows that journaling can have a significant impact on mental health. Many people find that writing down their thoughts and feelings helps them release frustrations without having to talk to others. Freely expressing your innermost thoughts and frustration may be a cathartic and therapeutic way to release your feelings in a safe and controlled space. Nonetheless, if symptoms are recurrent or severe, making an appointment with a counselor or a therapist may be a helpful option that can lead to healing and recovery.Reaching out for mental health supportThe effects of psychological distress may interfere with a person's ability to accomplish everyday tasks. It may help to talk to an unbiased person with professional experience in helping people navigate psychological distress. Therapists are trained to help people feel comfortable discussing emotionally stressful situations.If you're experiencing psychological distress that makes it difficult to leave home, you may benefit from online therapy. With online therapy, you can discuss your symptoms from home or anywhere with an internet connection via phone, texting, or video chat. Also, with BetterHelp, you can contact your therapist at any time, day or night, through in-app messaging, and they'll respond as soon as possible. This may be especially useful if you want to discuss symptoms of distress in between sessions.In addition to being convenient, online therapy has been shown by numerous peer-reviewed studies to be effective for a variety of mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression. One systematic review and meta-analysis published in The Lancet found that online therapy was more effective than traditional in-office therapy at reducing depression symptoms. "Travis has been an incredible find as my first therapist! I hit the jackpot with him - he's approachable, easy to open up to, and fully engaged in our sessions. He listens attentively to my problems and has already provided me with valuable insights and effective tools to tackle my anxiety and boost my self-esteem in just a few sessions. He was thorough in helping me understand exactly what to expect from our sessions, which was important considering this was my first time, and I can't recommend him enough. I feel safe, seen and cared for with him and I look forward to our continued journey." - BetterHelp member's review of their therapistMany factors can contribute to psychological distress, and it can manifest in different ways in each person. While some people learn to reduce or manage the symptoms on their own, it may be helpful to speak with a licensed counselor, whether in your community or online. If you think online therapy is right for you, you might choose BetterHelp, which has an extensive network of more than 30,000 licensed therapists, so you can be matched with a therapist who has experience helping people overcome psychological distress. Take the first step toward healing from psychological distress and contact BetterHelp today.Psychological distress (PD) is a nonspecific term for mental anguish, stress, or suffering. The following examples are common risk factors for psychological distress: job dissatisfaction, conflict in family life, and loneliness. Defensive factors, such as participation in community and social support can reduce the risk of PD. Examples include experiencing sleep disturbances after witnessing a traumatic event, becoming overwhelmed by an unhealthy work culture, or avoiding opening bills if you're experiencing financial strain. What is the difference between mental illness and psychological distress?A mental illness (also called a psychiatric disorder or mental disorder) is a diagnosable medical condition that meets specific criteria detailed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Psychological distress (PD) is a more general term for emotional discomfort and suffering, when stress is unhelpful, severe, or persistent, it's called distress. Unlike eustress, distress may impair performance, decrease motivation and energy, make it more difficult to focus on tasks, and lead to uncomfortable physical symptoms (like migraines or nausea). You may experience psychological distress in some of the following situations: There's a major upcoming deadline at workYou're living through war, conflict, or a natural disasterYou are experiencing financial insecurityYour work environment is very demandingLeft unaddressed, elevated stress hormones (like cortisol) and psychological distress can be harmful to both mental and physical health. Adverse health effects may include: digestive issues, weight changes, heightened risk of cancer, high blood pressure, higher susceptibility to stroke, reduced quality of life, and increased risk of mental health problems. What is psychological distress?Psychological distress is a general term for a subjective sense of discomfort, mental anguish, perceived lack of control, anxiety, or stress. Psychological distress may cause somatization, or physical manifestations of psychological factors. For example, some people may develop persistent gastrointestinal distress, low back pain, or migraines. In some cases, psychological distress may be transitory (short-term), while in other cases it may be persistent and indicative of a diagnosable mental disorder, such as anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder. For many disorders, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) includes "clinically significant distress or functional impairment" as a requirement for diagnosis. There are some mental health disparities when it comes to psychological distress, with one study finding that racial and ethnic minorities experience significantly higher levels of severe and moderate psychological distress than White participants. The researchers found that this disparity could mostly be attributed to socioeconomic differences and minority stress (such as discrimination and bias). What is a real life example of distress?There are many common examples of distress, such as: Feeling irritable and avoiding loved ones after a traumatic event Many people experience distress after living through or witnessing natural disasters, surviving intimate partner violence, or other traumatic events. Feeling worthless or defeated in a competition. However, when stress is unhelpful, severe, or persistent, it's called distress. While healthy stress can motivate you to study for the exam, distress may push you to avoid studying because you believe it's hopeless. Experiencing burnout at work that affects job performance and causes exhaustion: Psychological distress among workers is common, and some professions are at a higher risk than the general population. For example, healthcare professionals, teachers, and lawyers have some of the highest rates of burnout. Experiencing insomnia and lack of appetite after the loss of a loved one: When grieving a significant loss, psychological distress is very common. Whenever stress is severe, persistent, or harmful, it may be characterized as distress. Is psychological distress the same as depression?Depression refers to a group of psychiatric disorders, including major depressive disorder (sometimes called clinical depression), persistent depressive disorder, and disruptive mood dysregulation disorder. There are specific criteria laid out in the DSM-5 that are required to meet diagnostic criteria for a depressive disorder. Psychological distress is a more general term that indicates unhealthy stress, mental anguish, behavioral issues, and/or physical manifestations of psychological challenges. Psychological distress can impair mental health and it may indicate a mental disorder. Factors related to psychological distress include perfectionism, lack of social support, negative interactions with co-workers, and insomnia. Is mental distress the same as anxiety?Distress is frequently triggered by external factors, such as major life events or deadlines at work. Symptoms of distress may go away when the stressor is addressed or removed, such as when you stop working in a toxic work environment. Unlike distress, anxiety is characterized by persistent or intense worry that does not go away when stressors are removed. The symptoms of distress and anxiety are very similar, and they often co-occur, which can make it difficult to distinguish the two emotions. How do you treat psychological distress?If you're experiencing psychological distress, you may find the following strategies helpful. Take care of your mental and physical health by getting routine physical activity and eating a nutritious diet Establish a consistent bedtime routinePractice mindfulness, meditation, breathing exercises, or yogaLimit the use of substances like alcohol and cigarettesIf you're experiencing burnout, try to recognize the meaning and impact of your work, or consider talking to your boss to adjust your workload or autonomy with projectsLearn new communication strategies If your relationship is experiencing strainCounter self-criticism by practicing self-love and acceptanceConsider whether you're work, relationship, or other distressing situation is best for your mental health, and think about productive ways to address your stressorsMake time to volunteer, connect with loved ones, and pick up a new hobbyTalk with a mental health care provider, like a licensed psychotherapist or a marriage and family therapist Psychological stress is how the body and brain react to any need or demand seen as a challenge or obstacle. Psychological stress is not necessarily negative; some people see short-term stress as motivating, as with an exam or job interview. However, being under a lot of stress can sometimes cause physical symptoms and health problems, especially if you're not managing your stress well. This article discusses psychological stress, its signs, and how it can affect your health. It also offers suggestions for managing your stress. Within medicine, stress is the "body's response to physical, mental, or emotional pressure." There are different types of stress, which can all have effects on emotional and physical health. Situations and events that cause stress, called stressors, can occur once, briefly, or over a longer period. Types of stress include: Routine stress: This relates to the persistent pressures of school, work, relationships, and other responsibilities. Sudden negative stress: Examples of this type of stress include illness, losing a job, financial difficulty, or divorce. Traumatic stress: This is caused by a major event like an accident, assault, disaster, or any event where someone is fearful they may be seriously hurt or killed. This is caused by a short-term stressor, and it goes away quickly. Everyday experiences this at some point in their lives, and it is caused by a variety of situations. Examples of acute stress include: Taking an exam Job interview Exhilarating short events, like skiing down a mountainBrief surprising events, like hitting the brakes to avoid a car accidentHaving an argument This is stress that lasts for a longer time, such as for weeks or months. Someone may become used to it and not recognize it as stress or believe it is a problem. Examples of chronic stress include: Financial problems Unhappiness in a relationship or marriage Difficulty at work or school Having a chronic illness Problems at home or in your personal life In one study that also examined an association with social media use, the Pew Research Center used the Perceived Stress Scale to evaluate the stress levels of American adults. The average score was 10.2 out of 30, with 0 being no stress and 30 being the highest level.The researchers also found that women and men had different stress levels, with women being significantly more stressed overall. Older adults and those who are employed tend to have lower levels of stress. When responding to pressure, the body releases stress hormones, like epinephrine and norepinephrine. This causes an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels, which is supposed to help you escape an immediate threat. As a result, stress affects multiple body systems, and it affects every person differently. Severity depends on the cause and person. Cognitive or thinking-related effects of stress include: Difficulty focusing Memory issuesNegative thoughtsLack of self-confidence Worrying Trouble making decisions Emotional symptoms can include: Changes in mood Irritability HopelessnessFeeling tense, anxious, or nervousUnhappinessInability to relax Changes in behavior can also occur. These symptoms include: Eating or sleeping pattern changes Withdrawing from social life Nervous habits, like fidgeting, nail-biting, teeth grindingIncrease in use of caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs Decrease in work or academic productivity Chronic stress can increase the risk of multiple health conditions, including: Heart diseaseHigh blood pressure Diabetes ObesityDepression or anxiety Skin conditions, like eczema or acneChanges in menstruation (periods) Physical symptoms caused by stress include: Headaches Muscle tension Digestive problems, such as nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea Decreased interest in sex Increased heart rate High blood pressure Fatigue A lot of stress can be managed with coping strategies and self-care. However, when it becomes unmanageable, it is important to seek help from a mental health professional or another healthcare provider. This is especially true if you are experiencing overwhelming stress or stress affecting your functioning in life or health. Your healthcare provider may provide a referral to a mental health professional, like a therapist or psychiatrist. This could prevent long-term effects and help diagnose a possible mood or anxiety disorder that needs treatment. It can be challenging to manage stress, especially if there are a lot of people in your life with high expectations of you. Advice to slow down may not be helpful, since people often have few opportunities to do this. Finding ways to manage your stress can reduce its impact on you and stop it from getting worse. When your stress is well managed, you may avoid some of the health effects that go along with it. There are many ways to cope with stress, and everybody has different preferences when it comes to managing it. Self-care methods people use, as well as good lifestyle changes, include the following: Don't be too hard on yourself. Stress is normal and everyone experiences it. If you can't meet everyone's expectations all the time, it is important not to consider it a failure. Ask for help. If your work at home or at your job is overwhelming, ask someone for help. Delegating tasks to co-workers or family members can reduce your obligations and your stress level. Balance work and life. Make sure to leave some time for yourself every day. Write it all down. Schedule your time so you are working on a reasonable number of tasks every day. It can also help to journal your thoughts and record the days you feel particularly stressed and what triggered the stress. Take care of yourself. It is important to make sure you've scheduled enough time for exercise and that you're eating nutritious meals instead of settling for food that is convenient but less healthy. Prioritize sleep. Pay attention to how much sleep you're getting. If you don't get at least seven to eight hours a night, or if you feel sleepy throughout the day, choose an earlier bedtime. If going to bed earlier doesn't help or if you're having a hard time sleeping, take a look at your sleep habits. For example, make sure your bedroom is dark and quiet and that you aren't drinking alcohol or eating too soon before bed. Practice relaxation and mindfulness meditation. These can help release tension. Some common methods include progressive relaxation and deep breathing. Mindfulness increases focus and concentration on the present moment, which may also help reduce stress. Psychological stress is the way your body and brain respond to the pressures of life and the expectations of others. It can happen suddenly when an unexpected event such as job loss or the death of a loved one occurs, or it can be caused by routine daily pressures. Stress can cause mental health problems and contribute to physical problems. These include trouble focusing, problems with memory, irritability, and more serious chronic problems like heart disease and obesity. Finding ways to manage your stress can reduce the risk of developing long-term stress-related health problems. OverviewGood and badHealth impactsSignsSelf-careFinding a therapistShare on PinterestStress is "a six-letter word that many of us dread. Whether it's a tense interaction with a boss or pressure from friends and family, we all face stressful situations from time to time. For some of us, these events happen sporadically. For others, daily stress is a regular part of life.There's a good chance that we can all identify negative stress, but did you know that stress can also be positive? Good stress, called eustress, can actually be beneficial to you. Unlike bad stress, or distress, good stress can help with motivation, focus, energy, and performance. For some people, it can also feel exciting. On the other hand, bad stress typically causes anxiety, concern, and a decrease in performance. It also feels uncomfortable, and it can lead to more serious issues if not addressed. Stress has the ability to negatively impact our lives. It can cause physical conditions, such as headaches, digestive issues, and sleep disturbances. It can also cause psychological and emotional strains, including confusion, anxiety, and depression. According to the American Psychological Association, untreated chronic stress, or stress that's constant and lasts over an extended period of time, can result in high blood pressure or a weakened immune system. It can also contribute to the development of obesity and heart disease. There's a distinction between a stressor and actual stress. A stressor can be a person, place, or situation that's causing you stress. Stress is the actual response to one or a combination of those stressors. There are any number of situations that can cause stress. Dr. Gary Brown, a licensed psychotherapist, says some of the more common stressors include:relationship conflicts at homeNew or increasing work responsibilitiesincreasing demandsfinancial strainloss of a loved onehealth problemsmoving to a new locationexposure to one or more traumatic incidents, such as a car accident or a violent crimeKnowing how to spot the signs of stress is the first step in developing ways to manage its adverse effects.Some of the more common physical, psychological, and emotional signs of chronic stress include:rapid heart rateelevated blood pressurefeeling overwhelmedfatiguedifficulty sleepingpoor problem-solvingfear that the stressor won't go awaypersistent thoughts about one or more stressorschanges in behavior, including social withdrawal, feelings of sadness, frustration, loss of emotional control, inability to rest, and self-medicationWhen it comes to managing stress, making simple changes can go a long way in improving your overall health and reducing stress. Having tools and strategies you can turn to in stressful situations can prevent your stress levels from escalating.It's important to structure some of your time so that you can be comfortably busy without being overwhelmed, Brown says. "Working hard does not usually equate with working efficiently," he said. In fact, working too much can reduce productivity.Understanding that you aren't weak because you're feeling stress is important, Brown says. Stress is a very normal reaction to the stressors in your life.Before your stress levels escalate, reach out to someone you trust, such as a friend, family member, or coworker. Sharing your feelings or venting your concerns may help to reduce your stress.Set aside time to reflect on your day. Write down any thoughts or feelings you're having. This can be a useful tool to help you better understand your stressors and how you react to stress, Brown says.When it comes to managing stress, proper nutrition is your friend. Skipping meals can lower your blood sugar, which can depress your mood. In some cases, this can also trigger intense feelings of anger and frustration, Brown says.Engaging in regular physical activity can improve your overall health and reduce your stress levels. When you exercise, your body releases endorphins. These feel-good hormones can also ease symptoms of depression and anxiety. Your ability to manage stress decreases when you're tired. Try to get a recommended seven to nine hours each night. If you have insomnia, aim to get as much sleep as you can, then build in periods of rest during the day.These exercises, which can include deep, slow breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, involve tensing and then relaxing various groups of muscles. Try to carve out three minutes, three times a day to practice these exercises, says Dr. Russell Morfit, a psychologist.While it may feel awkward at first, consider scheduling the worry to specific parts of the day, Morfit says. "When we lean into our fears by deliberately seeking out our stressors and not avoiding them or escaping them, they often lose their power," he said.A therapist or mental health professional can also help you find ways to manage your stress.When looking for a mental health professional, ask friends or family members for referrals. After your first session, Puder says to reflect on the following questions:Will you trust the therapist? Do you feel heard and understood?Do you feel comfortable to speak up if you disagree with them?Can you see that they care about you as an individual?Answering these questions can help you determine if this person is right for you.Effective therapy sessions can happen in person, over the phone, and even online. To help find a therapist that's right for you, check out these five affordable therapy options. DefinitionSymptomsDiagnosisTreatmentContacting a doctorOutlookSummaryPsychological stress is a normal reaction to everyday pressures. However, chronic stress can be unhealthy, particularly when it affects a person's day-to-day life.Chronic stress can cause mental and physical symptoms and affect a person's behavior and relationships. Although preventing stress is not always possible, a person can learn to change their perception of stress and develop more effective coping strategies.This article defines stress and outlines the mental, physical, and behavioral symptoms. It also lists some common causes of stress and provides information on diagnosis, treatment, and management strategies.Share on PinterestGetty ImagesThe American Psychological Association (APA) defines psychological stress as an emotional response to an external trigger. Stress can be short-term or long-term, depending on whether the cause is temporary or ongoing.Stress triggers the release of certain hormones, such as noreadrenaline and cortisol. These hormones cause physiological changes in the body, which can negatively impact mental and physical health.However, as the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS) notes, people react to stress differently. Whereas one person may find a situation stressful, another may find it motivating.Psychological stress only becomes pathological when it interferes with a person's health and well-being.Read about the difference between stress and anxiety.According to the NHS, stress may affect a person's mental and physical health and behavior.Psychological stress may cause the following mental health symptoms:Psychological stress may also cause physical symptoms, such as:Prolonged or "chronic" stress also increases the risk of the following health conditions:People experiencing psychological stress may also develop certain patterns of behavior, such as:eating too much or too littleleeping too much or too littledrinking or smoking moreavoiding certain places or peopleStress can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic), depending on the cause.job interviewsschool examsunrealistic workloadsconflict with family, friends, or colleaguesIn 2022, a global market research company conducted a survey on behalf of the APA, investigating the prevailing causes of stress among United States (US) citizens. The survey identified several major causes of stress, including:the current political climatethe current racial climateconcerns over violence, crime, and safetyworries about money and inflationLearn more about chronic stress.Stress is not an illness, though chronic stress can make a person more susceptible to serious illness. For this reason, people must learn to recognize and treat the early symptoms of stress.Some people may have difficulty identifying the cause of their stress. A stress diary can help people identify their stressors and develop appropriate coping mechanisms. A stress diary should record any stressful episodes that occur over 2-4 weeks, along with notes on the following:the date and time that the stressful episode occurredthe place the episode occurredwho was presentthe thoughts and emotions a person experienced the physical sensations experiencingspecific behaviors that occurredthe stress rating from 0-10, with 10 representing the most intense level of stressThere is no single treatment for stress. Treatment involves identifying the cause of the stress and developing appropriate coping mechanisms. Often, this will involve making multiple lifestyle changes. The central nervous system releases the hormones adrenaline and cortisol in response to stress. Acute stress can dampen a person's appetite, whereas chronic stress can increase cravings for fat and sugar.A nutritious diet can boost energy levels, allowing people to better deal with stressors. 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By reframing the thoughts around a stressor, a person can manage their emotions and reduce feelings of stress.Learn more about stress and how to manage it.A person should consider contacting a doctor if they are experiencing difficulties coping with stress or if their stress levels remain high despite trying self-help methods.A doctor can recommend additional coping strategies for stress and may make a referral for talk therapy.The American Heart Association explains that the way an individual perceives stress plays an important role in the impact stress has on their health.According to the AHA, stress increases the risk of disease, whereas a positive attitude and a sense of optimism and purpose are associated with better overall health.Although it is not always possible to eliminate the cause of stress, a person can change their perception of stress so that it has less of an impact on their health and well-being. Lifestyle changes and talk therapy can help. Psychological stress is a normal human reaction to everyday pressures. It can cause emotional and physiological symptoms, and chronic stress can contribute to serious health problems.Treatment for stress usually involves lifestyle changes, such as exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, and practicing relaxation techniques. If these are ineffective, a person can ask their doctor about additional coping strategies or request a referral for talk therapy. Psychological distress, a widely-used indicator of the mental health of a population, nevertheless remains vaguely understood. In numerous studies, psychological distress is "largely" defined as "a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety." But how do you know if what you're experiencing is psychological distress or a diagnosable psychological disorder, such as anxiety or depression? If you've had a bad day, does that mean you're suffering psychological distress? If you lose your job and feel anxious and short-tempered, is this a sign you are in a state of psychological distress?Psychological Distress Vs. Psychological DisorderPsychological distress is generally considered a transient (not long-lasting) phenomenon that is related to specific stressors. It typically subsides when either the stressor is removed, or the individual adapts to the stressor. In the example of having a bad day, you're likely experiencing transient psychological distress. Tomorrow is another day, bringing with it the opportunity to see things differently, start anew, employ healthier self-protective measures and more. On the other hand, if you've lost your job and are irritable, anxious, quick-to-anger and display other negative emotions and behavior, and such distress continues for some period of time and now interferes with your daily activities, you may have crossed over from psychological distress of a transient nature to a more deeply-embedded psychological disorder requiring treatment.Distress that is characteristic of psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depression, involves functional impairment and "clinically significant distress" (also called "marked distress"). With anxiety disorders, symptoms do not go away and worsen over time. They also interfere with daily activities such as job, school, and relationships. To be diagnosed with depression, severe symptoms (negatively affecting how you feel, think and handle daily activities) must be present for two weeks.Signs of Psychological DistressYou likely know when something is off with someone you love, or within yourself. It could be transient and resolved rather quickly, or it could be indicative of an accumulation of factors causing psychological distress. WebMD lists a number of signs of emotional distress that equally apply to psychological distress.Disturbances in sleepFluctuations in weight, along with eating pattern changesPhysical changes that are unexplained, including headache, constipation, diarrhea, chronic pain, and rumbling stomachFrequently provoked to angerDeveloping obsessive/compulsive behaviorsChronic fatigue, excessive tiredness, no energyForgetfulness and memory problemsShying away from social activitiesNo longer finding pleasure in sexComments from others about your mood swings and erratic behaviorJunk Food Linked to Psychological DistressResearchers at California's Loma Linda University Adventist Health Sciences Center found that state adult residents consuming more unhealthy food were also likely to report psychological distress symptoms (either moderate or severe), compared to peers eating healthier diets. The study, published in the International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition, also found that nearly 17 percent of California adults are likely to suffer from mental illness, some 13.2 percent with moderate psychological distress and 3.7 percent with severe psychological distress. Researchers recommended targeted public health interventions promoting healthier diets aimed at young adults and those with less than 12 years of education.Goal Conflict and Psychological Distress LinkedA study conducted by the University of Exeter and Edith Cowan University found that personal goal conflict may increase feelings of anxiety and depression. They studied two forms of motivational conflict, inter-goal conflict (which occurs when pursuing a goal makes it difficult to pursue another goal), and ambivalence (when the individual has conflicting feelings about particular goals). Results of the study, published in Personality and Individual Differences, showed that each of these goal conflict forms were associated independently with depressive and anxious symptoms. Researchers said that those with poorer mental health are more likely to say their personal goals are in conflict with each other. Such goal conflicts can contribute to psychological distress.An earlier meta-analysis by researchers from the University of California, Riverside, published in the Journal of Research in Personality, found that higher levels of goal conflict are negatively associated with psychological well-being (lower levels of positive psychological outcomes and greater levels of psychological distress).How to Cope with Psychological DistressThe first step in effective coping with psychological distress involves identifying the potential causes for the distress and then resolving to take steps to alleviate or overcome it. This may involve psychological counseling to get at the root cause for the psychological distress. As part of the counseling, the psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional may recommend a number of different therapeutic approaches to help reduce psychological distress.Getting out in nature - A 2019 study published in Health Place looked at the beneficial effects of greenness (green space) and serious psychological distress among adults and teens in California and found epidemiological evidence of such benefits in the study group's mental health. While numerous other studies focused on adults and beneficial effects of green space, this population-based U.S. study aimed to fill in the gap with inclusion of teens. Another 2019 study, published in the International Journal of Environmental Health Research, reported that even short-term time spent in an urban park contributed to improvement in subjective well-being. The effect was independent of levels of physical activity. Improvement was reported in stress reduction and recovery from mental fatigue. Researchers recommended a minimum of 20 minutes in the park to achieve benefits from being in the green space. Try giving hugs - Researched published in PLOS One found that receiving hugs on days when subjects experienced interpersonal conflict helped attenuate the negative effects of the conflict on same-day and subsequent day. Researchers said their findings help contribute to an understanding of the role of interpersonal touch as a buffer against negative outcomes of interpersonal conflict and distress. Identify what you need and focus on what you want - Psychological distress is no picnic and when you're in the throes of it, you may be uncertain what to do next. Experts recommend healthy ways to deal with such distress that include, first and foremost, identifying what it is you need and then also focusing on what you want. You need to practice good self-care (being kind to yourself), engage in grounding, developing your nurturing self-voice and other proactive coping methods to help deal with psychological distress. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation.