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## Spirituality and stress relief: Make the connection

By Mayo Clinic staff

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## Spirituality and stress relief: Make the connection

**Taking the path less traveled by exploring your spirituality can lead to a clearer life purpose, better personal relationships and enhanced stress management skills.**

By Mayo Clinic staff

Some stress relief tools are very tangible: exercising more, eating healthy foods and talking with friends. A less tangible — but no less useful — way to find stress relief is through spirituality.

### What is spirituality?

Spirituality has many definitions, but at its core spirituality helps to give our lives context. It's not necessarily connected to a specific belief system or even religious worship. Instead, it arises from your connection with yourself and with others, the development of your personal value system, and your search for meaning in life.

For many, spirituality takes the form of religious observance, prayer, meditation or a belief in a higher power. For others, it can be found in nature, music, art or a secular community. Spirituality is different for everyone.

## How can spirituality help with stress relief?

Spirituality has many benefits for stress relief and overall mental health. It can help you:

- **Feel a sense of purpose.** Cultivating your spirituality may help uncover what's most meaningful in your life. By clarifying what's most important, you can focus less on the unimportant things and eliminate stress.
- **Connect to the world.** The more you feel you have a purpose in the world, the less solitary you feel — even when you're alone. This can lead to a valuable inner peace during difficult times.
- **Release control.** When you feel part of a greater whole, you realize that you aren't responsible for everything that happens in life. You can share the burden of tough times as well as the joys of life's blessings with those around you.
- **Expand your support network.** Whether you find spirituality in a church, mosque or synagogue, in your family, or in walks with a friend through nature, this sharing of spiritual expression can help build relationships.
- **Lead a healthier life.** People who consider themselves spiritual appear to be better able to cope with stress and heal from illness or addiction faster.

## Discovering your spirituality

Uncovering your spirituality may take some self-discovery. Here are some questions to ask yourself to discover what experiences and values define you:

- What are your important relationships?
- What do you most value in your life?
- What people give you a sense of community?
- What inspires you and gives you hope?
- What brings you joy?
- What are your proudest achievements?

The answers to such questions help you identify the most important people and experiences in your life. With this information, you can focus your search for spirituality on the relationships and activities in life that have helped define you as a person and those that continue to inspire your personal growth.

## Cultivating your spirituality

Spirituality also involves getting in touch with your inner self. A key component is self-reflection. Try these tips:

- **Try prayer, meditation and relaxation techniques** to help focus your thoughts and find peace of mind.
- **Keep a journal** to help you express your feelings and record your progress.
- **Seek out a trusted adviser or friend** who can help you discover what's important to you in life. Others may have insights that you haven't yet discovered.
- **Read inspirational stories or essays** to help you evaluate different philosophies of life.
- **Talk to others** whose spiritual lives you admire. Ask questions to learn how they found their way to a fulfilling spiritual life.

## Nurturing your relationships

Spirituality is also nurtured by your relationships with others. Realizing this, it's

essential to foster relationships with the people who are important to you. This can lead to a deepened sense of your place in life and in the greater good.

Make relationships with friends and family a priority. Give more than you

- receive.

See the good in people and in yourself. Accept others are they are, without

- judgment.
- Contribute to your community by volunteering.

### **Pursuing a spiritual life**

Staying connected to your inner spirit and the lives of those around you can enhance your quality of life, both mentally and physically. Your personal concept of spirituality may change with your age and life experiences, but it always forms the basis of your well-being, helps you cope with stressors large and small, and affirms your purpose in life.

#### References

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