



MayoClinic.com reprints

This single copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. For permission to reprint multiple copies or to order presentation-ready copies for distribution, use the reprints link below.

· [Order reprints of this article now.](#)

Spirituality and stress relief: Make the connection

By Mayo Clinic staff

Original Article:<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-relief/SR00035>

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

Certain tools to reduce stress are very tangible: exercising more, eating healthy foods and talking with friends. But there is another tool for helping you manage difficult times that can be just as beneficial, albeit harder to pin down — embracing your 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, this 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 you?

Spirituality has many benefits. It can help you:

- **Focus on personal goals.** 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 may be better able to cope with stress and heal from illness or addiction faster.

How can you define your spirituality?

The best way to uncover your spirituality is to engage in self-discovery. Here are some questions to ask yourself to discover what experiences and values define you:

- What are your important relationships?
- Where have you found comfort?
- What gives you hope?
- What brings you joy?
- What are your three most memorable experiences?
- If you have survived losses in your life, how have you done so?
- What do you believe will happen to you when your physical life ends, and how do you feel about that?
- Describe a time when you felt comfortable and all was right with the world.
- Describe a time when your life was filled with a sense of meaning or you were filled with a sense of awe.

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 begins with your relationship with yourself, is nurtured by your relationships with others and culminates in a sense of purpose in life. Realizing this, two of the best ways to cultivate your spirituality are to improve your self-esteem and to foster relationships with those who are important to you. This can lead to a deepened sense of your place in life and in the greater good.

Looking inward

- **Try prayer, meditation and relaxation techniques** to access your inner wisdom and help focus your thoughts.
- **Keep a journal** to help you express your feelings and record your progress.
- **Seek out a trusted adviser or friend** — preferably someone who has had similar life experiences — who can help you discover what's important to you in life. Sometimes others may have insights that you haven't been able to discover on your own.
- **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.
- **Be open to new experiences.** If you're exploring organized religion, remember to consider a variety of different faith traditions. If your spirituality is more secular, you might consider expanding your horizons with new experiences in the arts.

Nurturing relationships with others

- Develop effective listening and communication skills.
- Make relationships with friends and family a priority and stay in touch.
- Share your spiritual journey with loved ones and let them know what's important to you.
- Seek out others with similar spiritual beliefs and engage in conversation to learn from each other.
- Volunteer within your community.
- See the good in people and in yourself.

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. Remember that spirituality is a dynamic process and a constantly evolving internal journey. 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 maintain a reasonable stress level and affirms your purpose in life.

July 23, 2008

SR00035

© 1998-2010 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER). All rights reserved. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for noncommercial personal use only. "Mayo," "Mayo Clinic," "MayoClinic.com," "EmbodyHealth," "Enhance your life," and the triple-shield Mayo Clinic logo are trademarks of Mayo

Foundation for Medical Education and Research.