

self-care tips



Managing Overwhelming Emotions: A Personal Action Plan

Imagine yourself in these situations:

- Your doctor has just told you that you have an ongoing condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure.
- You are struggling with worsening symptoms of arthritis or another ongoing condition.
- There has been a big change in your work or personal life, such as a layoff or divorce.

What is your reaction? How are you feeling? Are you angry or sad? Are you feeling frustrated and under stress? Are you feeling anxious or a little depressed?

These overwhelming emotions are normal and can happen to anyone faced with a life-changing situation. Learning to live with an ongoing condition or other big change in your life can be very stressful. The good news is that you can take control of these situations and manage your overwhelming feelings by making and completing a personal action plan.

A personal action plan can help you take control of the areas of your life that affect how you react to and manage overwhelming emotions. These include:

- Caring for your mental health
- Using relaxation skills
- Doing physical activity
- Eating healthy

Personal action plans are short-term plans to help you reach a goal (such as taking control of overwhelming emotions). They include a specific action or behavior that you want to do and know that you will be able to accomplish. Your plan must answer these questions:

- **What** are you going to do?
- **How much** are you going to do?
- **When** are you going to do it?
- **How many** days of the week are you going to do it?

My goal is: *To take control of and manage my overwhelming emotions*

Here are some examples of changes to make or actions to take that can help you reach your goal.

To take care of my mental health, I will

- Make an appointment with my doctor to learn more about my health condition and talk about the concerns and feelings that I have had lately.
- Take a workshop that deals with stress management or managing ongoing health conditions at my local Kaiser Permanente Center for Healthy Living.
- Talk it out. I will share my feelings, concerns, and frustrations with those who are close to me.
- Stop negative self-talk.
- Avoid being a perfectionist.
- Set aside time for problem-solving early in the day so I don't go to bed worrying about my "to do" list.



Action plan example:

"This week I will write down any negative things I say about myself and change them to positive things (*what*) for 15 minutes (*how much*) before going to sleep (*when*) on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday (*how many*)."

To be more relaxed and less stressed, I will

- Laugh and appreciate humorous situations when they come up. Keep an emergency laughter kit that contains funny movies, books, cartoons, jokes, and pictures.
- Practice some deep-breathing exercises. Inhale deeply through the nose by filling the lungs completely and feel the stomach expand like a big balloon. Exhale slowly and completely through pursed lips. The exhale should take twice as long as the inhale. Go slowly.
- Listen to gentle meditation music or a guided imagery exercise, which can quiet the mind as well as the body. Find these at kp.org/listen.
- Take a warm bath, read a book, or do a relaxing activity such as yoga or tai chi before going to bed.



Action plan example:

"This week I will take deep breaths (*what*) at least two times (*how much*) before responding to a request (*when*) on Monday and Friday (*how many*)."

To be more physically active, I will

- Start slowly, and gradually work up to 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 or more days a week. Activities such as dancing, walking, swimming, or bicycling are good low-impact activities to try first.
- Check the Resources section of kp.org/healthybalance for fitness videos.
- Include some strength training to build muscle and endurance, and stretching exercises or yoga to improve flexibility.

Action plan example:

"This week I will march in place (*what*) during all commercials (*how much*) when I watch my favorite TV shows (*when*) on Tuesday and Thursday (*how many*)."

To eat healthier, I will

- Eat healthy meals that include plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein.
- Be prepared by bringing healthy snacks to work.
- Have healthy meals ready in the freezer for days when I am busy or not feeling very well.
- Keep the refrigerator stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Action plan example:

"This week I will bring fruit to work (*what*) and eat one serving (*how much*) at each break and lunch (*when*) on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday (*how many*)."

What will you include in your personal action plan for this week?

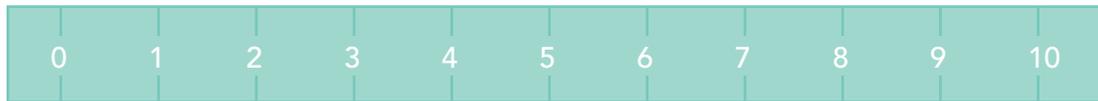
Mental health activities			
This week I will:	_____	_____	_____
	(<i>what</i>)		
_____	_____	_____	_____
(<i>how much</i>)	(<i>when</i>)		(<i>how many</i>)

Relaxation skills			
This week I will:	_____	_____	_____
	(<i>what</i>)		
_____	_____	_____	_____
(<i>how much</i>)	(<i>when</i>)		(<i>how many</i>)

Physical activity			
This week I will:	_____	_____	_____
	(<i>what</i>)		
_____	_____	_____	_____
(<i>how much</i>)	(<i>when</i>)		(<i>how many</i>)

Healthy eating habits			
This week I will:	_____	_____	_____
	(<i>what</i>)		
_____	_____	_____	_____
(<i>how much</i>)	(<i>when</i>)		(<i>how many</i>)

How important is it to you to accomplish your goal?



0 = not important at all

10 = very important

When to Call a Doctor or Other Health Care Professional

Sometimes practicing relaxation techniques, eating right, and being physically active are not enough to manage overwhelming emotions. If feelings of anxiety, overwhelming emotions, or depression last for two or more weeks, it may be time to get professional help. **If you are having symptoms of depression or anxiety, contact your doctor or call the Behavioral Health Care Helpline at 1-800-900-3277 for mental health services 24 hours, 7 days a week.**

Kaiser Permanente Self-Care Resources

Which ones will you make part of your personal action plan?

- Contact your local Center for Healthy Living for programs that can help you deal with stress and anxiety by working on mind-body health, quitting tobacco, or managing an ongoing condition. Check kp.org/centerforhealthyliving for programs near you.
- Listen to audio programs (podcasts) that include meditations for conditions and diseases, healthy living, and emotional wellness at kp.org/listen.
- Work with a wellness coach over the phone for support to quit tobacco, manage your weight, get active, reduce stress, or eat healthy. Call Wellness Coaching by Phone at **1-866-862-4295** Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., to schedule a phone appointment.

National Mental Health Resources

National Institute of Mental Health
1-866-615-6464
nimh.nih.gov

American Psychiatric Association
psychiatry.org/patients-families

American Psychological Association
apa.org/helpcenter