



**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## Manage Stress with Taking Care of You

### Situation

Stress is common among people in Wisconsin and across the United States. Three out of four Americans report at least one symptom of stress in the span of a month. Wisconsin residents also have an average of 3.8 bad mental health days in a month. It is well known that too much stress can have a direct impact on a person's physical and mental health, lead to unhealthy behaviors and decrease the quality of life.

While stress and symptoms of stress are very common, many people do not have proper tools or skills to effectively reduce or manage the daily stress they experience. Coping skills can help manage stress levels or reduce symptoms of stress to improve overall health and quality of daily life.

### Response

Taking Care of You is a University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension program that aims to create positive change through mental health promotion.

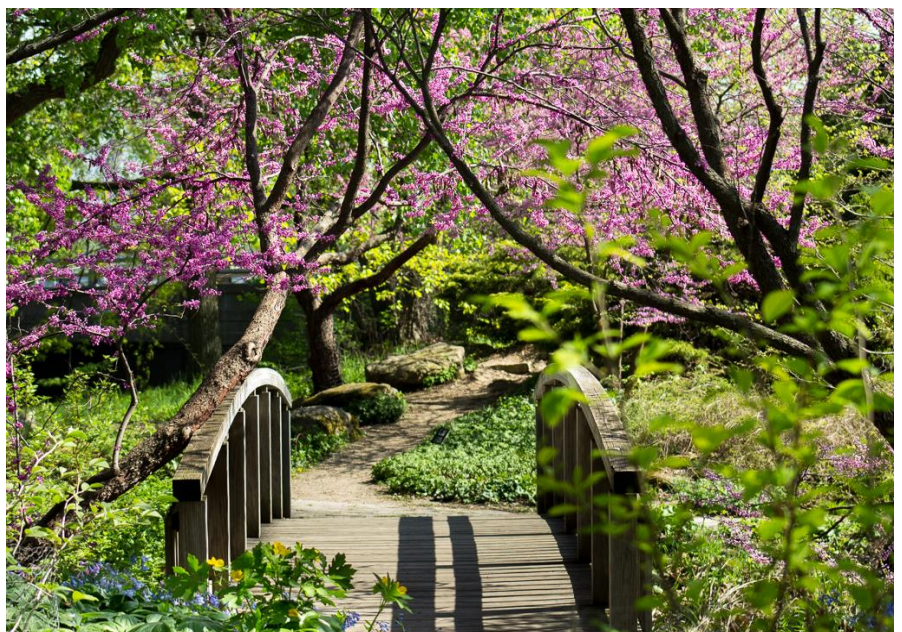
Extension leaders hosted a Taking Care of You training for Master Trainers to prepare

program facilitators in January 2017. Since then, Master Trainers have been training new facilitators in Wisconsin, and facilitators have been delivering the Taking Care of You curriculum to communities around the state. Taking Care of You was typically delivered as an 8-hour program, delivered 2 hours a week for 4 weeks. The number of sessions could be adjusted to suit the needs of the community.

Through the multi-session program, developed by the University of Missouri-Extension, adults learn research-based and practical stress reduction strategies for their mind, body and spirit.

Various topics are explored through small group discussion, self-reflection and mindful activities to help individuals:

- Become more aware of the mind-body connection and how to use this awareness for better health.
- Develop habits that can lead to a healthier body, mind and spirit.
- Respond versus react to stress.
- Discover opportunities in life's challenges.
- Simplify and bring more joy into life.
- Live more in the moment.



## Results

### Awareness

Participants were asked about their level of awareness of various stress-related and health/well-being concepts before and after the program. Participating in Taking Care of You resulted in statistically significant improvements in awareness of all stress/well-being related topics that the program intended to change ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The graph below shows the percent of participants who had the highest level of awareness for each health or stress-related concept before and after participating in Taking Care of You. The percentage of participants who had a great deal of awareness in self-management techniques increased the most. Nine percent of participants started with “a great deal” of awareness of self-management techniques before the program,

and 52% had “a great deal” of awareness after the program (an increase of 43 percentage points).

### Planned Behavior Change

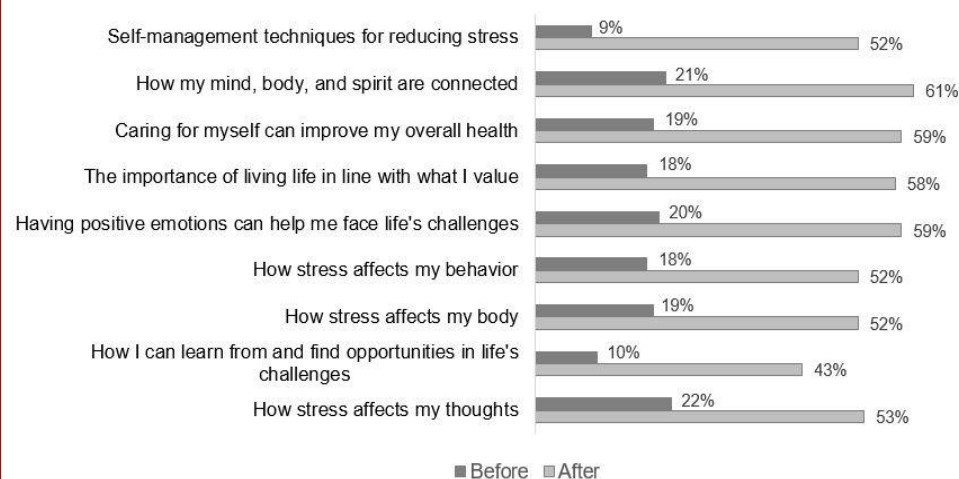
Participants were asked to share one skill they plan to use to reduce their stress because of their participation in the Taking Care of You Program. The top four stress reduction techniques that participants planned to use are:

- Breathing techniques (37%)
- Practicing mindfulness/awareness (13%)
- Practicing gratitude or identifying joyful aspects of their life (8%)
- Simplifying their life (6%)

Participants also shared one action they plan to take to improve their overall health. The top changes they planned to make are:

- Working on their physical health by eating healthy/mindfully, participating in physical activity or by taking care of illnesses (22%)
- Using mindfulness, breathing or meditation (22%)
- Focusing on self-care and putting their needs first (13%)

Percentage of TCY Participants Indicating "A Great Deal" of Awareness Before and After the Program (n=631)



The graph shows the percentage of participants before and after the program that had the highest level of awareness on a five-point scale (5-point Likert scale; 1= Not at All, 2=Very Little, 3 = Neutral, 4= Quite a Bit, 5= A Great Deal); sorted from greatest to least amount of change.

**To learn more about Extension's Taking Care of You program, contact:**

Amber Canto  
Health and Wellbeing  
Institute Director  
608-262-0384  
amber.canto@wisc.edu