



## 5 Alternatives to Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

When times get tough, it can be instinct to look for a coping mechanism. Coping mechanisms can help people feel like they're escaping reality by relieving stress or being able to distract their minds. While this is a normal feeling, it becomes a problem when one turns to unhealthy coping mechanisms, which can be harmful in the long run.

This article explores ways to turn unhealthy coping mechanisms into healthier alternatives.

### Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

There are typically four main reasons people turn to unhealthy or destructive behaviors: mental health, stress, isolation and neurobiology. Here are some of the most common unhealthy coping mechanisms:

- **Oversleeping**—Sleep is a common way that people try to escape. While sleep is good for your overall health, too much sleep can inhibit the amount of movement your body needs daily.
- **Excessive drug or alcohol use**—Substance misuse can be a dangerous coping mechanism as it can have serious long-term side effects such as health complications, addiction and death.
- **Over- or under-eating**—Over- or under-eating outside of the recommended guidance can cause health issues. Try to stay within the recommended daily intake guidance.
- **Impulsive retail spending**—Excessive shopping can lead to financial problems. Making small purchases over time can also lead to hoarding or family problems.

### Alternatives to Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

It's normal to have feelings of wanting to escape from reality due to stress or anxiety. Healthy coping mechanisms can help address stress and anxieties in a positive way—and also develop into long-lasting habits.

Check out these healthier alternatives for coping with stress or other unpleasant emotions:

1. **Create task lists.** Unhealthy coping mechanisms can prevent you from reaching your short- and long-term goals. Making a task list of personal goals can help you achieve the things you want and elevate your mood by physically seeing your accomplishments when they're checked off the list.
2. **Talk about stress.** Find someone willing to listen to you, such as a close friend, family member or mental health professional. Putting your feelings into words can help alleviate stress and feelings.
3. **Address negative feelings.** Negativity is a normal part of life. Trying to avoid it is called avoidance behavior, which can result in reaching for unhealthy coping mechanisms.
4. **Learn your triggers.** Knowing what you negatively respond to can help help you keep track of and be aware of how you react.
5. **Pick up a new hobby.** For example, outlets such as painting or picking up running can be therapeutic. Incorporate a frequent time and space to practice your new hobby.

### Practice Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Having negative or overwhelming emotions is normal. It's important to consider using healthy coping mechanisms to help deal with stress. If you have an ongoing emotional problem, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.