

Managing Stress



**What You Need to
Know**

This brochure can help you learn more about managing stress. It doesn't replace regular medical checkups or advice from your health care team. Talk with your doctor about ways to manage stress.



**Getting Healthier
Together**

What Is Stress?

Stress is your brain and body's response to a demand or challenge.

- ▶ Everyone faces some stress. You may feel stress when you take a test or go on a job interview. Stress can also help you react quickly in an emergency. These kinds of short-term stress are normal.^{1,2}
- ▶ What may cause stress for one person may not cause stress for another. For example, some people feel relaxed when driving a car while others become tense when they drive.
- ▶ Stress is not helpful when it affects your daily life and mood. **Stressful situations or events that last a long time or do not go away can lead to serious health problems.**¹

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Most people who have faced or witnessed a terrifying event, such as a natural disaster or serious accident, will recover from their symptoms naturally soon after. Those who keep having symptoms, such as bad dreams or angry outbursts, may be diagnosed with PTSD.³



If you are under a great deal of stress or feel you have PTSD, talk with your doctor.



Some facts about stress⁴

- ▶ More than **three-quarters of adults** report they **have symptoms of stress**. For example, headache, feeling tired, or changes in sleep.
- ▶ Nearly **half of adults** say they have **laid awake at night** because of stress in the past month.

What adults are doing to manage stress:

44% of adults say they exercise or walk to manage stress



47% say they listen to music



More than one-third (**37%**) spend time with friends or family



What Happens When You're Stressed?



Your body is designed to experience and react to stress. It can help you survive a dangerous situation.²

When you are in danger, stress tells your body to face the threat or flee to safety.¹

In response:

- ▶ Your pulse quickens
- ▶ You breathe faster
- ▶ Your muscles tense
- ▶ Your brain uses more oxygen and becomes more active

This stress response is called “fight or flight.”



What are the effects of long-term (chronic) stress?

Stress can be unhealthy when you are faced with constant challenges without any relief. **With long-term (chronic) stress, your body never gets a clear signal to return to normal.** Over time, this causes wear and tear on your body—to your physical, mental, and emotional health.²

Stress that is not managed may contribute to health problems such as¹:

- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ Depression and anxiety

Stress can also²:

- ▶ Lead to bad habits like smoking, drinking alcohol, or overeating
- ▶ Make a health condition worse
- ▶ Lead to emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and panic attacks



Common Causes of Stress

Many events or situations can cause stress.⁵ Some are positive, others are negative.

- ▶ **Emotional issues**—feeling troubled or angry, not being able to deal with your emotions
- ▶ **Major life changes**—death of a family member, losing a job, getting married, buying a house
- ▶ **Workplace stress**—demanding work, a tiring work schedule, feeling unsatisfied with your work
- ▶ **Sense of control**—the belief you do not have control over your life
- ▶ **Support network**—feeling lonely, being isolated from others, feeling a lack of friendship or support



- ▶ **Family and relationships**—being busy with children and family, caregiving for an elderly parent, conflict with loved ones
- ▶ **Attitude and outlook**—negative thoughts about life, difficulty accepting change
- ▶ **Financial problems**—difficulty paying bills, unexpected expenses
- ▶ **Social situation**—facing discrimination based on your race, gender, age, or sexual orientation⁶



What Are the Warning Signs of Stress?



Feeling stress for too long, whether for hours, days, or months, sets off your body's warning system. There are many signs that stress may be affecting you. They can be physical and emotional. Stress warning signs tell you that something isn't right and that you may need help and extra care.

Some warning signs are^{2,5}:

- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Muscle tension in neck, face, or shoulders
- ▶ Grinding teeth, tightened jaw
- ▶ Upset stomach, diarrhea
- ▶ Acid reflux
- ▶ Chest pain, racing heart
- ▶ Trouble falling or staying asleep
- ▶ Having little or no energy
- ▶ Weight gain or loss
- ▶ Lack of concentration or focus
- ▶ Loss of appetite or overeating
- ▶ Memory problems or forgetfulness
- ▶ Short temper, being angry or irritable
- ▶ Sexual problems
- ▶ General aches and pains
- ▶ Feeling anxious, worried, or depressed
- ▶ Nail biting
- ▶ Increased number of colds

When you know the warning signs of stress, you can do something about them.



Healthy Ways to Manage Stress

Here are some things you can do to help manage stress.^{7,8}

Practice healthy lifestyle habits

- ▶ Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- ▶ Be physically active.
- ▶ Get plenty of sleep.
- ▶ Avoid using drugs and alcohol to deal with stress.



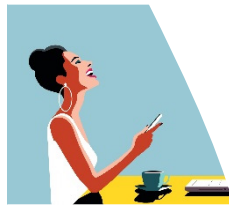
Take charge and manage your time

- ▶ Make a “to-do” list at the start of each day. Label each item: “A” (most important), “B” (important, but can be put off for a while), or “C” (can be put off).
- ▶ Combine errands and make only one trip. Double recipes when you cook; freeze the other half for later.
- ▶ Share tasks with others. Ask a co-worker to help you with a project. Ask a family member to help out with tasks at home.



Lighten your mood

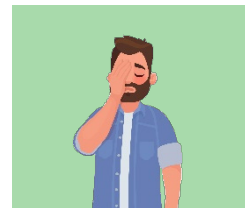
- ▶ Take a 10-minute “time-out” to pamper yourself or relax.
- ▶ Keep a positive attitude. Think of all the good things in your life.
- ▶ Laugh often and find reasons to feel cheerful.



- ▶ Practice saying “No.” Try to say “yes” only for things that are important to you.

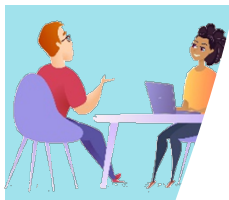
Watch for signs of stress

- ▶ Learn to identify and respond to stress early.
- ▶ Think about what things make you feel stressed. Plan how you can handle them or work around them.



Reach out to others

- ▶ Share your problems. Talk about how you’re feeling and coping.
- ▶ Find comfort and support from family and friends.
- ▶ Recognize when you need more help. Talk with your doctor or a counselor.



- ▶ If news events are causing you stress, take a break from listening to or watching the news.

Relaxation Exercises to Reduce Stress



Follow the steps below to feel more relaxed. You can try these alone or with a partner.^{9,10}

Deep breathing

Step 1: Get into a comfortable position. You can sit or lie down. Close your eyes and focus on your body and your breath.

Step 2: Take a deep, slow breath through your nose. Let your belly fill with air. Then breathe out. Relax and let all of the air go out through your nose.

Step 3: Place one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest.

Step 4: Breathe in and out through your nose. Focus on shifting your breath so you can feel the rise and fall of your breathing in your belly more than your chest.

Step 5: Take three more slow, deep breaths as you focus on your belly rising and falling. Keep breathing fully and deeply as your breath slows and you become more relaxed.



Muscle relaxation

When you focus on slowly tensing and relaxing each muscle group in your body, it can help you feel the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.

Step 1: Start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes.

Step 2: Slowly work your way up to your neck and head.

Step 3: Tense your muscles for about 5 seconds and then relax for 30 seconds and repeat.

Note: You can also start with your head and neck and work down to your toes.



Action Plan



A personal plan for managing stress

Step 1: Please check the box for each action below that you want to take. Note that not all actions listed may apply to your personal situation.

Step 2: Select how confident you feel that you can take each action you choose. Circle a number from 1 to 10. A confidence level of 10 is the most confident and a 1 is the least confident.



Avoid stressful situations	
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid people or situations that bring me stress.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Practice saying “no” when “yes” will lead to stress.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Make a “to-do” list at the start of each day.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Change the situation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Share some of my tasks with others.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Combine errands so that I make fewer trips.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Think about the things that cause me stress and plan how I’ll work around them.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Practice healthy lifestyle habits	
<input type="checkbox"/> Be physically active.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Eat healthy.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Get plenty of sleep.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid using drugs and alcohol to deal with stress.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Make time for fun and relaxation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Take 10-minute “time-outs” to pamper myself or relax.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to people.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<input type="checkbox"/> Do something fun every day.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Step 3: Think about which action you’ll begin first. Write down a specific step you’ll take to start. For example, if you choose “Make time to relax,” your goal might be: I will do some muscle relaxation exercises 3 times a week after dinner for 2 weeks.

Step 4: Please write the day and time that you will take this first step.

For example, Monday at 7:00 PM.



Managing Stress: What You Need to Know

Stress caused by short-term events is a normal part of life experienced by everyone.



Stressful events or situations that last a long time can lead to serious health problems.

Know the cause of your stress

Many events or situations can cause stress. Some are positive; others are negative:

- ▶ Your health
- ▶ Emotional issues
- ▶ Major life changes
- ▶ Workplace stress
- ▶ Sense of control
- ▶ Support network
- ▶ Family stress
- ▶ Attitude and outlook
- ▶ Financial problems

How stress can be harmful

Over time, too much stress can cause serious problems. Stress can affect how you think, act, and feel. It can:

- ▶ Make it harder for your body to fight illness
- ▶ Hurt your relationships with family, friends, and people you work with
- ▶ Lead to bad habits like smoking, drinking alcohol, or overeating
- ▶ Make a health condition worse
- ▶ Lead to emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, and panic attacks

Post-traumatic stress disorder

- ▶ People who have faced or witnessed a terrifying event may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- ▶ If you are under a great deal of stress or feel you have PTSD, **talk with your doctor**

Warning signs of stress

There are many signs that stress may be affecting you. They can be physical and emotional. Some warning signs are:

- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Muscle tension
- ▶ Grinding teeth
- ▶ Upset stomach
- ▶ Acid reflux
- ▶ Chest pain, racing heart
- ▶ Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- ▶ Little or no energy
- ▶ Weight gain or loss
- ▶ Lack of concentration
- ▶ Loss of appetite or overeating
- ▶ Memory problems
- ▶ Short temper
- ▶ Sexual difficulties
- ▶ Aches and pains
- ▶ Feeling anxious, worried, or depressed
- ▶ Nail biting
- ▶ Increased frequency of colds

When you know the warning signs of stress, you can do something about them.

Healthy ways to reduce stress

- ▶ Practice healthy lifestyle habits
- ▶ Lighten your mood
- ▶ Take charge and manage your time
- ▶ Reach out to others for support
- ▶ Watch for signs of stress and respond early
- ▶ Do relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation

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