

Stress Management

Stress Management

Stress is your body's fight-or-flight response. You may feel energy surge through your body if you are in an emergency, or if you are worried or anxious about something.

Stress can be found at home, work, school, or in traffic. A situation you find threatening may trigger stress. For example, you may feel stress in the following situations:

- a co-worker who gets a promotion you thought should have been yours
- divorce
- financial problems
- marriage
- job loss or change
- moving
- having a baby
- a disagreement with a child
- a serious illness within the family
- being stuck in traffic when you are running late
- standing in a long line at the grocery store with a fussy child.

What Stress Can Do

Stress can give you health problems or make a current problem worse. It can increase your breathing, heart rate and blood pressure. Feelings of anger may turn into long-lasting (chronic) irritation and feelings of fear may become anxiety. Long-term stress can interfere with your daily life and cause:

- illness (weakened immunity)
- depression
- anxiety disorders
- ulcers
- high blood pressure
- phobias
- disturbed sleep patterns
- tension headaches.

Stress affects everyone but reactions to stress vary from person to person. You cannot make stress go away but you can manage it.

How to Manage Your Stress

To manage stress, start by learning about yourself. What do you like? What do you hate? What calms you down? What stresses you out? Know that, and you're on your way to managing stress.

Here are some tips to help you manage stress.

- **Maintain good health habits.**
Eat healthful foods and avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. A healthy body tolerates stress more effectively.

(over)

- **Be physically active.**
Physical activities often relieve the body of unnecessary tensions. Strenuous exercise is not necessary because even moderate exercise has health benefits.
- **Get plenty of rest.**
Your body and mind need to “re-energize” each night. Most adults do not get enough sleep each night.
- **Structure daily activities.**
Plan out your activities to make the best use of your time. Make sure to include personal time for yourself and do something you enjoy.
- **Set realistic goals.**
Ask for help if you need it.
- **Do not worry about things you cannot change.**
Let it go. Focus on what you can do.
- **Identify what causes you stress.**
Avoid those situations if possible.
- **Talk about stress.**
Talking with a close friend, spouse or health care provider may help you relax.

How to Relax

- Find a comfortable position on the floor.
Use pillows to support your head and legs.
- Keep all of your joints flexed and supported.
Do not rest one body part on another.
- Take a deep breath and relax.

- Contract the muscles of your forehead.
Release.
- Focus your eyes. Release.
- Clench your teeth. Release.
- Contract your jaw. Release.
- Draw your shoulders up toward your ears.
Release.
- Make fists and straighten your elbows.
Release
- Take a deep breath, expand your chest and hold. Release.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles. Release.
- Squeeze your buttocks together. Release.
- Tighten your pelvic muscles. Release.
- Tighten your thighs. Release.
- Tighten your calves. Release.
- Point your toes toward your nose. Release.
- Contract everything. Release.
- Let your entire body relax.
- Breathe deeply in a rhythm.
- Rest this way for a few minutes.
- Get up slowly and gently.

When to Get Help

Talk with your health care provider if stress interferes with your everyday life or if you are having physical problems.