



# Managing Stress: What You Need to Know

# Managing Stress

## INTRODUCTION

Everyone is likely to have experienced stress in their life. Stress can be short lived like being in traffic or waiting in a long line. Or it can last a longer period of time, like with the death of a family member or problems paying bills. It might seem like there is nothing you can do about day-to-day stress—but there is. You can empower yourself to take control of your stress. Managing stress is all about knowing the triggers of stress, changing the way you think about stress, and controlling the emotional and physical response to stress.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. Everyone handles stress differently. What may cause stress for one person may not cause stress for another. For example, one person may feel relaxed when driving a car, whereas another person may become tense when they drive. Having a little stress can be good, like when studying for a test or playing a sport. Having a lot of stress over time can be bad for your health. The good news is that with the right methods **you can manage the stress in your life.**



## HOW CAN STRESS BE HARMFUL?

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

Stress can	Cause aches and pains	Headache, backache, neck pain, stomach ache, tight muscles, or clenched jaw
	Impact your energy level or sleep patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling tired for no reason</li><li>• Having a hard time falling or staying asleep</li></ul>
	Impact your mood or feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Anger</li><li>• Depression</li><li>• Helplessness</li><li>• Tense</li><li>• "Out of control" feeling</li><li>• Easily irritated</li><li>• Inpatient</li><li>• Forgetful</li></ul>

Stress can also:

- Make it harder for your body to fight disease
- Hurt your relationships with family and friends
- Lead to bad habits like smoking, drinking alcohol, or overeating
- Make a health condition worse



# Ways of Coping with Stress

## Unhealthy ways some people cope with stress

How do you respond to stress? These are some of the **unhealthy** ways that people sometimes try to cope with stress. These methods may seem to help at first, but can be very damaging over time.

- ⊗ Smoking
- ⊗ Drinking too much alcohol
- ⊗ Over- or under-eating
- ⊗ Sleeping too much
- ⊗ Working too much
- ⊗ Trying to do too many things at once
- ⊗ Eating fast
- ⊗ Zoning out in front of the TV for hours
- ⊗ Taking out your stress on others (yelling, screaming, angry outburst, or violence)
- ⊗ Withdrawing from friends, family, or activities
- ⊗ Slowing down or putting things off
- ⊗ Using pills or drugs to relax

## Healthy ways to reduce stress

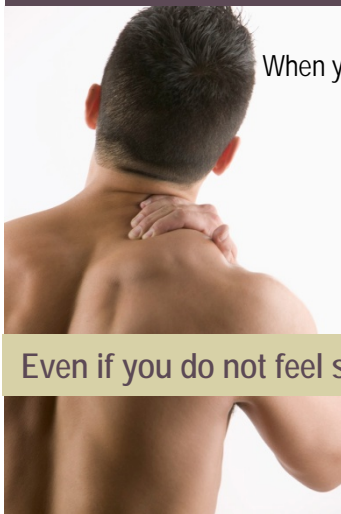
Reduce stress by...	What does that mean for you?	Examples
Avoiding stressful situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn how to say “no”</li> <li>• Avoid people or things that stress you out</li> <li>• Take control of the things around you</li> <li>• Avoid “hot-button” topics</li> <li>• Make your “to do” list smaller</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know your limits and stick to them.</li> <li>• If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off.</li> <li>• If traffic’s got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route.</li> <li>• If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list.</li> </ul>
Changing the situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell people how you feel—don’t hold it in</li> <li>• Be willing to compromise</li> <li>• Be assertive</li> <li>• Manage your time better</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them.</li> </ul>
Changing how you respond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at problems differently</li> <li>• Look at the big picture</li> <li>• Adjust your expectations</li> <li>• Focus on the positive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some “alone time.” Don’t set yourself up for failure by demanding perfection.</li> </ul>
Accepting what you can’t change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize things you can’t control and don’t try to control them</li> <li>• Look for the positive</li> <li>• Share your feelings</li> <li>• Learn to forgive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments.</li> </ul>
Making time for fun and relaxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make time to relax</li> <li>• Connect with others</li> <li>• Do something fun every day</li> <li>• Laugh</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike. Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.</li> </ul>
Being healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise Regularly</li> <li>• Eat healthy</li> <li>• Get enough sleep</li> <li>• Avoid alcohol, smoking, and drugs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Getting enough sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body.</li> </ul>

# Important Things to Know About Stress

## Know the causes of your stress

For most of us, stress is caused by daily hassles and events. For example, commuting to work, or having too many demands on your time can cause stress. Stress can be caused by more serious problems like money issues, or having a chronic health condition like diabetes. Stress can also come from sudden life changes like having a baby, or losing a job. Stop for a moment and think about the things or events that lead to your stress.

## Know the early signs of stress



When you know what your signs of stress are, you can do something about them.

How stress can make you feel:

Nervous  
Angry  
Irritable  
Tired  
Depressed  
Excited  
Tense in the neck and shoulders  
Worried

Even if you do not feel stress, it still affects your body.

## Take small steps to improve stress level

When you feel stress, take a few moments to relax and try to let go of the tension. Here are a few things you can do:

- ✓ Stop and count to 10 before you react.
- ✓ Take a few slow, deep breaths.
- ✓ Walk away from the stressful situation, and say you'll handle it later.
- ✓ Go for a walk.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to say "I'm sorry" if you make a mistake.
- ✓ Set your watch 5 to 10 minutes ahead to avoid the stress of being late.
- ✓ Break down big problems into smaller parts. For example, answer one letter or phone call per day, instead of dealing with everything at once.
- ✓ Drive in the slow lane or avoid busy roads to help you stay calm while driving.
- ✓ Smell a rose, hug a loved one, or smile at your neighbor.
- ✓ Listen to music.
- ✓ Stretch and relax your muscles.
- ✓ Take a warm bath or shower.

*When you recognize the signs of stress, you can take steps to relieve it and gain more control.*





## ... To Help Relieve Stress

### 2 Relaxation Techniques for Relieving Stress

#### Deep breathing

- ✓ Begin breathing deeply, keeping the air in for a couple of seconds and slowly release it through your mouth
- ✓ Repeat this action several times, and you should start to feel relaxed
- ✓ When practicing this technique do not do it very fast; you may start to feel dizzy

#### Muscle relaxation

When we contract or squeeze our muscles and then relax them, our body releases some of the accumulated tension. This relaxation technique is based on the way our body reacts.

- ✓ Contract and relax the muscles in your legs several times
- ✓ Repeat the techniques with the muscles in your back, arms, stomach, etc.
- ✓ You should start feeling relaxed little by little
- ✓ Repeat this technique until you feel relaxed



## What is Stress?

Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are under stress, your body reacts as if you are in danger. Some stress is normal; it can even be useful, such as the way you might feel when you are trying to win a race. Everyone handles stress in a different way. What may cause stress for one person may not cause stress for another. For example, one person may feel driving is relaxing; whereas another person may become tense when they drive.

### 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:

- Give you headaches, an upset stomach, or back pain
- Make it hard to sleep
- Make it harder for your body to fight off disease
- Hurt your relationships with family and friends
- Cause you to lose your temper more often
- Lead to bad habits like smoking, drinking, and overeating

Also, if you have a health condition, stress may make it worse.



## Controlling Stress: How to Get Started

### 1. Know the Causes of Your Stress

For most of us, stress is caused by daily hassles and events. For example, commuting to work, or having too many demands on your time can cause stress. Stress can be caused by more serious problems like money issues, or having a chronic health condition like diabetes. Stress can also come from sudden life changes like having a baby or losing a job. Stop for a moment and think about the things or events that lead to your stress.

### 2. Know the Early Signs of Stress

When you know what your signs of stress are, you can do something about them. Stress can make you feel:

- Nervous
- Angry
- Irritable
- Tired
- Depressed
- Excited
- Tense in the neck and shoulders
- Worried

Even if you do not feel stress, it still affects your body.

### 3. Take Small Steps to Relieve Stress

When you are stressed, take a few moments to relax and let go of tension. Here are a few things you can do:

- Stop and count to 10 before you react
- Go for a walk
- Take a few slow, deep breaths
- Focus on positive thoughts
- Listen to music
- Stretch your muscles
- Take a hot bath or shower
- Massage neck and shoulders to release tension

#### Take steps today to stay healthy

- Know the causes of your stress and early signs.
- Take steps to relieve stress.

# Action Plan for Stress Management



Check off items from the list below that you will be able to change or improve. Or you can write in your own action items. Here are some things you can do:

## Take care of yourself.

Eat healthy foods. Get enough sleep. Do not smoke. Limit alcohol and caffeine.

## Exercise.

Regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do to manage stress. Talk with your health care provider before starting any exercise program.

## Manage your time.

Give yourself enough time to get things done. Do important things first. Learn to say "no" when you already have a lot to do.

## Think positive.

Replace bad thoughts with good ones. Remember the good things in your life.

## Try a hobby.

This can give you a break from your daily stresses. Do something you really enjoy. Some ideas are gardening, painting, or reading.



## Share your feelings.

Do not try to cope with stress on your own. Talk with family and friends. Ask for their support and guidance. If you feel your stress is too much to handle, talk with your health care provider.

## Try to solve your problems.

If something or someone is bothering you, talk about it. Get help when you have too many demands.

## The good news is that:

You can keep stress under control. It will take some effort, but over time, you could be leading a more relaxed life.

## Other

1. Are the items that you have chosen achievable?  Yes  No

2. What will you do to make these changes? \_\_\_\_\_

3. When will you make these changes? \_\_\_\_\_

