

A Little Stress Is Normal

Stress can be good when it helps you rise to challenges.

- It can help you face threats and act quickly in an emergency.
- Stress can also sharpen your abilities and help you perform better.

But Too Much Stress Can Harm You

Here are some problems that stress can worsen or even cause:

- Tiredness or exhaustion.
- Poor concentration or memory.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Headache, sweating, nervousness.
- Frequent colds.
- Eating or sleeping problems.
- Abdominal cramps or nausea.
- Mood swings, irritability, impatience, short temper and anger.
- Anxiety, worry, fear and depression.
- High blood pressure, chest pains, heart disease, heart attack, stroke.



It is normal to feel overly stressed sometimes. No one lives a stress-free life. The challenge is to *manage* stress so it doesn't dominate your life.

What Causes Stress?

Both little things and big things count.

- **Normal, everyday problems:** commuting delays, computer problems, misplacing things, other people's bad moods.
- **Specific situations:** public speaking, a job interview, a blind date, work deadlines.
- **Significant life events:** marriage, divorce, a new baby, a new job, moving, a serious illness, the death of someone close.
- **Other problems:** family problems, relationship problems; financial worries, trouble on the job.

People respond differently to stress.

- A situation that makes YOU anxious may not bother someone else at all. Some people thrive on deadlines, for example. Others are paralyzed by them.
- Something that worries you a lot at first may be much less stressful later. The first day on a new job can be hard. A couple of weeks later, you will probably be much more comfortable.

9 Healthy Ways to Cope

Taking even *one* of these steps can help you manage stress.

1. Get plenty of sleep.

- Have a regular sleep schedule. When you're rested you have more energy to deal with stressful events.
- If caffeine keeps you awake at night, cut down on coffee, soda and other caffeine-containing drinks.
- Nicotine can also keep you awake. For free help to quit smoking, call 311.

2. Be physically active.

- Regular exercise is powerful. It improves mood, relieves stress and makes you healthier. It can even help prevent depression.
- Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as a brisk walk) at least 5 days a week.

3. Breathe!

- When people get anxious, they sometimes hold their breath, or breathe fast and shallow.
- Practice deep breathing. Relax your belly and breathe deeply into your abdomen. Inhale and exhale s-l-o-w-l-y.
- Yoga, meditation and other relaxation techniques also relieve stress.

4. Talk about it.

- Talk with a trusted friend, family member, or religious advisor.
- Talking puts problems in perspective. Worries decrease, and solutions emerge.
- Spend more time with people who support you, and less time with people who *don't*.

5. Write about it.

- Keep a "stress journal" for a week to help you identify your triggers.
- Describe what makes you tense. What happened? How did you feel?
- Look at the events that were most stressful. Pick ONE thing to work on.

6. Treat yourself well.

- When you're overwhelmed, everything feels more difficult. It's harder to be good to yourself. *But now is the time to try.*
- Eat as well as you can. Get to bed on time. Keep your medical appointments. Take your daily medicine.
- Can't do it ALL today? Nobody's perfect. Try again tomorrow.

7. Make time for yourself.

- Do something you enjoy *every day*.
- Get somebody to watch the kids for awhile. Go to the movies or take a walk in the park.
- Take short breaks at work. Take a long weekend. Take a real vacation for once.

8. Keep it simple.

- Set realistic expectations and goals. Take small, not big, steps. (Reorganize a drawer, not the whole house.)
- Try to change the way you see things:
 - Don't mistake temporary problems ("*I'm tired today*") for permanent ones ("*I'm too old to change*").
 - Don't mistake specific problems ("*I have a bad habit*") for general ones ("*I'm a bad person*").

9. Laugh it off.

- Laughter has stress-relieving benefits – and it's FREE.
- Humor helps us see problems as "challenges" instead of "threats." It connects us with others, and it's *contagious*.
- Get more laughter in your life:
 - Rent a hilarious movie.
 - Play with your pet.
 - Get really silly with the kids.

