

Managing Your Stress

What is Stress?



Stress is a Fact of Life.

Stress is the response of your body to any demand made upon it. Whenever there is a need to adapt to change in our lives, there is stress. Some stress motivates and excites us; other stress makes us anxious or tense. Whether stress is positive or negative, our body responds in the same way.

Stress is a Body Reaction.

Hormones, such as adrenaline, are released into the bloodstream. Heartbeat and blood pressure may increase; blood sugar may rise. We may feel tired, irritable, depressed, anxious, or have difficulty eating, or sleeping.

Stress Affects Health.

If a stressful situation endures for a long time, the immune system weakens and we are subject to diseases and disorders such as colds, ulcers, asthma, heart attack or stroke.

What Causes Stress?

An infinite number of factors can cause stress. The most common causes are abuse, life changes, sad events or losses, hormonal changes, misuse of alcohol or other drugs, poor diet, certain medicines, accidents, physical conditions and anxiety.



Anxiety

Anxiety is the name we give to fears or tension about things that may or may not happen. Some people only feel anxious in certain situations. Others have “performance anxiety,” thinking they need to live up to others’ expectations.

Negative Thinking

We contribute to our anxiety through negative self-talk. When our self-talk is positive—“Everything will work out,” “I know I can do the job,”—we give ourselves permission to succeed and actually make it happen. When self-talk is negative—“I know I’ll have a lousy time,” “I’m not smart enough to pass the test,”—we give up before we even try. The more positive our self-talk is, the better we are able to meet the demands of daily living.

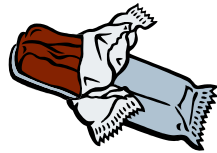
Cigarettes, Caffeine and Sugar



Cigarettes, caffeine and sugar all increase stress. When you smoke, your heart rate, blood pressure and hormone levels increase. Your body needs more of certain vitamins and minerals to cope with this stimulation. Cigarettes are expensive, highly addictive, and contribute to major illnesses.



Caffeine speeds you up for as long as 20 hours. It causes symptoms such as sleeplessness, upset stomach, increased blood pressure, and in women, breast lumps.



Sugar (white, brown, honey, fructose) gives a quick boost of energy, then leaves us with less energy. Many sugary foods contain little food value, yet eating them makes us feel less hungry for nutritious foods. As a result the body suffers from a lack of important vitamins and minerals. Sugary foods, such as desserts, candy and soda pop, contribute to weight problems. People today become hooked on sugar and caffeine in childhood due to poor dietary habits.

Drugs and Alcohol



People turn to alcohol and other drugs to help relieve tension and pressure, failing to realize that these substances actually make stress worse. If you use drugs or alcohol to “calm down,” consider the following. Drugs and alcohol are poisons. Drug and alcohol addictions are progressive. They tend not to stop on their own, but get more and more troublesome over time. They can harm your immune, circulatory, and nervous systems.



So What Can We Do?

1. Have a Support System

One of the best ways to get through periods of distress is to turn to trusted friends for support, comfort, and help. Make the effort to reach out to others. If your problems are too complex or



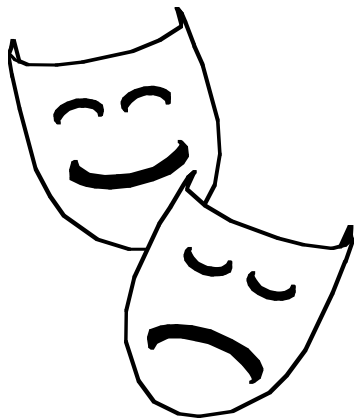
personal to share with friends, seek the help of a trained professional. College counselors can refer you to other professionals or services that will specifically address your needs or concerns. In times of trouble, your best resource is other people.

2. Minimize the Effects of Stress

There are many ways to keep the negative effects of stress to a minimum.



- Take time to relax each day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Learn to “let go” of things that are outside your control. Learn to adapt to changes.
- Learn to take action when you *can* make a difference.
- Avoid excessive alcohol, caffeine, fats and sugar. Don’t smoke.
- Give time to something or someone you believe in.

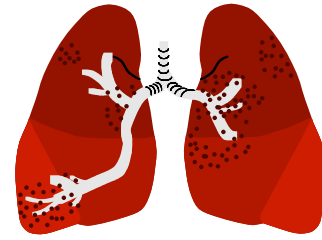


3. Learn to Worry Effectively

Worrying usually works against us because it does not provide solutions to a problem. It merely reinforces the idea that we have a problem. We can get so caught up worrying that we become depressed, anxious, or irritable. But worrying can be helpful when it leads to action to solve a problem.

Practice analyzing your worries. Take one worry at a time, think it through to the end, and come up with a solution. For example, instead of worrying about whether or not you will pass a course, try listing steps you can take to help you pass.

4. Learn to Breathe...



The simplest and best way to stop the stress response is to breathe deeply and slowly, filling the lungs full of air, then exhaling the air completely. It sounds simple, and it is.

Breathing Under Stress

Most adults breathe from the upper chest. This type of shallow breathing brings in less oxygen, forcing the blood to move quickly through the system. As a result, not enough oxygen gets to the brain and organs which leads to higher blood pressure.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing reverses these effects. Begin by breathing through your nostrils. Count to five, saying the word “in,” and let your lower abdomen fill with air. Then count to five, silently saying the word “out,” as you let the air escape through pursed lips. Do this deep breathing for two minutes or more each time. With practice you will be able to count slowly to ten or higher. You can increase your relaxation if you imagine breathing in ocean air, the scent of flowers, or forest air.

Effects Of Deep Breathing

Deep breathing can relieve headaches, backaches, stomach aches, and sleeplessness. It releases the body’s own painkillers called *endorphins*. It allows blood pressure to return to normal. Use deep breathing any time, anywhere. It’s one of the best techniques for relieving stress.



- eating a sugar-free diet
- taking medication

5. Banish the Blues

We all have times when we feel “blue” or mildly depressed. When such feelings persist over time even small things become difficult to accomplish and we find ourselves feeling more depressed. Depression can be devastating, but help is available.

Depression has many different causes: loneliness, lack of affection, death of a loved one, severe illness, divorce, loss of a relationship, or feeling powerless over a situation.

Feelings such as anger, shame, remorse, or any emotions over which we have no control, can result in depression. Sometimes the high standards we set for ourselves can lead to depression when we fail to live up to them. Certain food allergies, poor diet, or low blood



sugar can also contribute to depression.

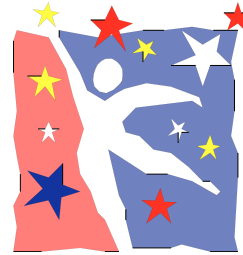
Recognize the Signs of Depression

- loss of interest in home and work
- frequent crying
- change in eating habits; eating too much or too little
- unexplained nervousness or grouching
- poor self-image/low self esteem

Treatment for depression may include:

- therapeutic counseling
- eliminating certain foods from the diet
- vitamin B6, folic acid, and/or niacin supplements

6. Learn to Laugh



Laughter can improve your mood and help to relieve stress. Watch a funny movie or TV show, share a joke with a friend, or read something that amuses you.



7. Eat a Healthy Diet

Vitamins and Minerals

Without enough B vitamins you can feel depressed, grouchy, nervous, or have trouble sleeping. Without enough iron (found in molasses and spinach), you can feel grouchy, nervous, and forgetful. Thiamin (found in soybean products) helps you feel calm, sleep well, and fight depression. Vitamin B12 (found in tuna fish) gives you energy.

Carbohydrates and Fats

Carbohydrates, (including wheat, pasta, bread, sweets) tend to calm you down. Low-fat proteins (including meat, fish, low-fat dairy products) give you energy. Excessive fat in the diet slows you down and makes you feel sluggish.

A healthy diet includes low-fat protein (meat, fish, beans), complex carbohydrates (vegetables, fruit, whole grains), and small amounts of fats (olive, safflower, or other vegetable oils).



8. Exercise Regularly

Exercise helps improve mood and relieves stress because it affects chemicals in the brain. It gives you a sense of accomplishment, improves your self-esteem, helps you sleep better and improves your overall fitness. Consider walking, jogging, or swimming. Be sure to include warm-up and cool-down periods with plenty of stretching. Talk to your health-care provider before starting an exercise program.



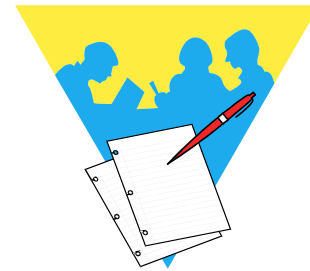
9. Get Enough Sleep

Getting too much or too little sleep can make you feel more stressed. Try to go to bed and get

up at the same times every day. Talk to your health-care provider if you have problems sleeping.

10. Learn Relaxation Techniques

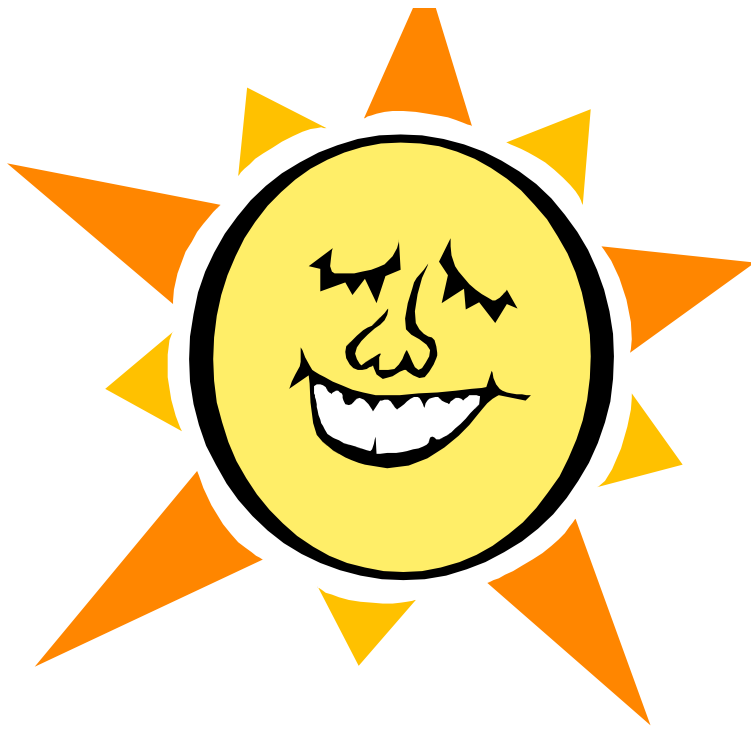
These include meditation, visualization, deep breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation. Talk to a counselor or a health provider who can



teach you these techniques, then practice on your own.

11. Plan a Realistic Schedule

Having a plan helps people get through the day. Include some activities that you enjoy along with the things you have to do. You may not be able to do everything you want, and that's OK. Break big jobs into smaller tasks and set priorities.



Managing Stress Successfully

Now that you have the tools to manage your stress, use them. Notice your stress level and relax by practicing deep breathing. Allow yourself time each day to do something you enjoy that gives you a sense of peace and relaxation. Devote time each day to positive thinking and relaxation. The more you practice stress management in your life, the easier it will be to handle your daily stresses. You will find that everything becomes easier and more manageable and life is more enjoyable when you are in control of stress.