

Stress Management Basics



Health and Wellness

Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand (stressor) made upon it. The response of the body is the same regardless of the stressor. Stress is the body's physiological and psychological reaction to a situation. Stress is neither good nor bad, but rather acts as an internal alarm system that prepares your body for action.

Sources of Stress

Many things in your life, both big and small, can cause stress. Stress can be caused by high-pressure situations or events that last for a long time, such as problems at work or conflicts in your family. Other personal issues that can cause stress include your health, your relationships and major life changes.

What Are Signs of Stress?

Stress is the body's reaction to harmful situations — real or perceived. When you feel threatened, a chemical reaction occurs in your body that allows you to act in a way to prevent injury. This reaction is known as “fight-or-flight,” or the stress response. During stress response, your heart rate increases, breathing quickens, muscles tighten and blood pressure rises.

Symptoms of Stress

Emotional symptoms include:

- Becoming easily agitated, frustrated and moody
- Feeling overwhelmed, like you are losing control
- Having difficulty relaxing and quieting your mind
- Feeling lonely and/or depressed and avoiding others

Physical symptoms include:

- Low energy and insomnia
- Headaches, aches, pains, tense muscles and rapid heartbeat
- Upset stomach, including diarrhea, constipation and nausea
- Frequent colds and infections
- Nervousness and shaking, ringing in the ear, cold or sweaty hands and feet
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, clenched jaw and grinding teeth

Facts About Stress

Ongoing, chronic stress can cause or exacerbate many serious health problems, including:

- Mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and personality disorders
- Cardiovascular disease, including heart disease, high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms, heart attacks and stroke
- Obesity and other eating disorders
- Skin and hair problems, such as acne, psoriasis, eczema and permanent hair loss
- Gastrointestinal problems, such as GERD, gastritis, ulcerative colitis and irritable colon

Tips for Managing Stress

Use these healthy techniques to help manage and reduce stress:

1. **Take a break from the stressor.** When you give yourself permission to step away from a pressing issue, you can form a new perspective or practice techniques to feel less overwhelmed.
2. **Exercise.** Exercise benefits your mind as well as your body. Even a 20-minute walk or run can give an immediate effect that can last for several hours.
3. **Smile and laugh.** People often hold a lot of the stress in their face. Laughing or smiling can help relieve some of that tension.
4. **Get social support.** Call a friend or send an email. When you share your concerns or feelings with another person, it helps relieve stress.
5. **Meditate.** Meditation helps the mind and body to relax and focus. Much like exercise, research has shown that even meditating briefly can reap immediate benefits.

Sources:

www.apa.org/helpcenter/manage-stress.aspx
www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management

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