

Healthy People

Health and Balance—Managing Stress

Everyone has stress, because life isn't something we totally control. The question is: Are you managing your stress, or has it mastered you? The answer matters a lot for your health. If you're stressed often over time, it puts you at risk for heart disease, depression, and other problems. The key is to stop stress before it stops you. It's simpler than you might think: Solve stressful problems when you can. And when you can't, connect with other people, and get active.

Use these tips to help keep stress at bay:

- Ask yourself what you can do about the sources of your stress. Think through the pros and cons. Take action where you can.
- Keep a positive, realistic attitude. Accept that although you can't control certain things, you're in charge of how you respond.
- Stand up for yourself in a polite way. Share your feelings, opinions, or beliefs, instead of becoming angry, defensive, or passive.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques. Try breathing exercises, meditation, prayer, yoga, or tai chi.
- Exercise regularly. You'll feel better and be more prepared to handle problems.
- Eat healthy. Avoid too much sugar. Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein. When you're stressed, you'll probably want less-nutritious comfort foods, but if you overdo them, they'll add to your problems.
- Try to manage your time wisely.
- Say no, where you can, to things that would add more stress to your life.
- Make time for hobbies and interests.
- Get enough rest and sleep. Your body needs time to recover from stressful events.
- Don't rely on alcohol, drugs, or food to help against stress. Ease up on caffeine, too.
- Spend time with people you love.
- Talk with a counselor or take a stress management class for more help.
- How Does Stress Affect Health?
- Stress that continues without relief can lead to headaches, an upset stomach, high blood pressure, chest pain, problems with sleeping or sex, depression, panic attacks, or other forms of anxiety and worry.



On top of that, if you handle stress with food, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, gambling, overspending, or other things that don't solve the problem, you're going to end up with more stress.

What Are the Warning Signs of Stress?

Chronic, ongoing stress can wear down the body's natural defenses, leading to symptoms including:

- Dizziness or a general feeling of "being out of it"
- General aches and pains
- Grinding teeth, clenched jaw
- Headaches
- Indigestion or acid reflux symptoms
- Increase in, or loss of, appetite
- Muscle tension in neck, face, or shoulders
- Problems sleeping
- Racing heart
- Cold and sweaty palms
- Tiredness, exhaustion
- Trembling or shaking
- Weight gain or loss
- Upset stomach, diarrhea
- Sexual problems
- Being irritable, impatient, or forgetful

