

Manage Stress

Source: <https://healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/everyday-healthy-living/mental-health-and-relationship/manage-stress>

Not all stress is bad. But chronic (ongoing) stress can lead to health problems.

Preventing and managing chronic stress can lower your risk for serious conditions like heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and depression.

You can prevent or reduce stress by:

- Planning ahead
- Deciding which tasks need to be done first
- Preparing for stressful events

Some stress is hard to avoid. You can find ways to manage stress by:

- Noticing when you feel stressed
- Taking time to relax
- Getting active and eating healthy
- Talking to friends and family

When people are under stress, they may feel:

- Worried
- Angry
- Irritable
- Depressed
- Unable to focus

Stress also affects the body. Physical signs of stress include:

- Headaches
- Back pain
- Problems sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Weight gain or loss
- Tense muscles
- Frequent or more serious colds

What causes stress?

Change is often a cause of stress. Even positive changes, like having a baby or getting a job promotion, can be stressful.

Stress can be short-term or long-term.

Common causes of short-term stress:

- Needing to do a lot in a short amount of time
- Experiencing many small problems in the same day, like a traffic jam or running late
- Getting lost
- Having an argument

Common causes of long-term stress:

- Problems at work or at home
- Money problems
- Caring for someone with a serious illness
- Chronic (ongoing) illness
- Death of a loved one

Over time, chronic stress can lead to health problems. Managing stress can help you:

- Sleep better
- Control your weight
- Get sick less often
- Feel better faster when you do get sick
- Have less neck and back pain
- Be in a better mood
- Get along better with family and friends

Being prepared and feeling in control of your situation might help lower your stress. Follow these 9 tips for preventing and managing stress.

1. Plan your time.

Think ahead about how you are going to use your time. Write a to-do list and figure out what's most important – then do that thing first. Be realistic about how long each task will take.

2. Prepare yourself.

Prepare ahead of time for stressful events like a job interview or a hard conversation with a loved one.

- Stay positive.
- Picture what the room will look like and what you will say.
- Have a back-up plan.

3. Relax with deep breathing or meditation.

Deep breathing and meditation are 2 ways to relax your muscles and clear your mind.

4. Relax your muscles.

Stress causes tension in your muscles. Try stretching or taking a hot shower to help you relax.

5. Get active.

[Regular physical activity can help prevent and manage stress](#). It can also help relax your muscles and improve your mood.

- Aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes a week of physical activity. Try going for a bike ride or taking a walk.
- Be sure to exercise for at least 10 minutes at a time.
- Do strengthening activities – like crunches or lifting weights – at least 2 days a week.

6. Eat healthy.

Give your body plenty of energy by [eating healthy foods](#) – including vegetables, fruits, and lean sources of protein.

7. Drink alcohol only in moderation.

Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to manage stress. If you choose to drink, [drink only in moderation](#). This means no more than 1 drink a day for women and no more than 2 drinks a day for men.

8. Talk to friends and family.

Tell your friends and family if you are feeling stressed. They may be able to help. [Learn how friends and family can help you feel less stressed](#).

9. Get help if you need it.

Stress is a normal part of life. But if your stress doesn't go away or keeps getting worse, you may need help. Over time, stress can lead to serious problems like depression or anxiety. Consult with your doctor or talk with a counselor or therapist.

Lots of people need help dealing with stress – it's nothing to be ashamed of!