



Manage stress to protect your health



Modern-day stress

Life asks a lot of us – spouses, jobs, friends, kids and pets – it can all add up and sometimes it's more than we can handle.¹ That's when stress kicks in.

Stress is actually your body's response to danger. You know the feeling – sweaty palms, racing heartbeat, an upset stomach. The hormones released used to help people face physical threats. But because we don't fight saber-toothed tigers anymore, the hormones aren't as helpful to us on a regular basis.

How long-term stress affects you

Nowadays, due to the demands of modern life, stress can last for weeks instead of just minutes or hours like in the past. When that happens, your system goes into overdrive and stress hormones can disrupt many of your body's processes.²

What is stress?

Stress is about the relationship between the demands of your life and the emotional resources you have to meet these demands. Demands are usually things like your job or something going on with your family. Your health, your outlook on life, your relationships with family and friends, and your money situation affect how deep your emotional reserves go. Once your emotional resources are drained, you have a hard time meeting the demands life puts on you, and you start to feel stressed.³

Tame your stress

These activities can help you manage stress and keep it at bay. Give them a try today.^{2, 4}

- **Get out and exercise.** Consider walking, jogging, biking or anything else that gets you active. Physical activity releases chemicals in your body that give you a greater sense of well-being.
- **Laugh out loud.** Laughing lightens your mental load and does good things for your body. Laughter fires up and then cools down your stress response.
- **Talk to friends and family.** They can distract you, provide support and help you weather life's ups and downs.

If nothing you do seems to lower your stress levels, talk to your doctor. Sometimes other health problems can have similar symptoms.



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Sources

1 The American Institute of Stress, What is Stress? (accessed January 2015): stress.org

2 Mayo Clinic, Stress Relievers: Tips to Tame Stress (accessed January 2015): mayoclinic.com

3 National Institute of Mental Health, Q&A on Stress for Adults: How it affects your health and what you can do about it (accessed January 2015): nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress

4 Mayo Clinic, Stress Management (accessed January 2015): mayoclinic.com

5 Helpguide.org, Stress Symptoms, Signs and Causes (accessed January 2015): helpguide.org

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- **Do yoga.** Yoga uses both physical and mental focus to create peace of body and mind. This helps you relax and manage stress. Try yoga on your own or find a class in your area.
- **Get more rest.** Sleep recharges your brain and body. Get the right amount and you'll improve your mood and energy level.
- **Speak up.** Saying "no" to some of the demands on your time and energy can help you keep stress at bay. Ask for help from coworkers or family members if there's too much on your plate.
- **Write it down.** Whether you're making a list of the things you need to do, or just writing out your feelings, jotting it down on paper can help put things into perspective.
- **Play some tunes.** Play, sing or listen to music. It relaxes your muscles and decreases stress hormones.
- **Change your focus.** Take a break from what you think you should be doing and focus on something else. Try gardening, painting, drawing, sewing, woodworking or another activity that keeps your mind off what's stressing you out.
- **See a counselor or therapist.** A professional can help you find the sources of your stress and learn new coping tools.

Try some of these tips to live your life with less stress. Talk to your doctor if these changes do not help you. Sometimes other health problems have similar symptoms.⁴

Not all stress is bad. Happy events, like a new job, getting married, having a baby or buying a house can also cause stress. But too much stress for too long can be bad for your health. Stress is linked to:^{2, 5}

- Higher risk of heart disease
- Obesity
- Digestive problems
- High blood pressure
- Heart palpitations and breathing problems
- Memory loss
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Trouble managing anger
- Drinking too much alcohol

Helpful resources

Visit WebMD's Stress Management Health Center for information and tools to help you manage the stress in your life.

Visit [empireblue.com](https://www.empireblue.com) for more ways to get healthy — and stay healthy.

