

How to reduce family stress

Work deadlines are looming. The kids have soccer practice — at the same time, but in different places. They have homework and projects due. Your parents asked you to come over to help with yard work...it goes on and on.

If you're like most families, you face stress every day. But by taking a few steps, you can prevent, detect and manage stress for a happier and healthier family life.



What's stress anyway?

Stress involves life's demands and how you meet them. Your job, family problems, health, outlook on life, finances and social network — they all can produce stress. When life's demands are greater than what you can handle, you start to feel stressed.¹ The way you feel when you're stressed — low energy, headaches, upset stomach, rapid heartbeat — is the same way your body responds to danger and aggression.

When stress lasts for weeks or longer, it can hurt your health. Hormones released when you're stressed can disrupt your whole body, increasing your risk for heart disease, obesity, digestive problems, memory impairment, insomnia and depression, among other things.²

Children can feel stress, too.

Stress isn't just for adults. Many children experience a level of stress that interferes with life, activities and health. Parents should watch the following signs:

- Physical stress symptoms in children can include changes in eating habits, headaches, new or recurrent bedwetting, nightmares and other sleep disturbances, stuttering and stomach problems.
- Emotional symptoms include anxiety, excessive worrying, the inability to relax, new or recurring fears, clinginess, questioning, anger, crying, an inability to control emotions, and aggressive or stubborn behavior.³

Tips for helping your child manage stress:³

- Provide a safe, consistent and dependable home.
- Be selective in TV viewing.
- Spend calm, relaxed time with your child or children.
- Encourage your children to talk and express concerns.
- Set aside time for physical activity.
- Build your children's feelings of self-worth.
- Allow your children opportunities to make choices and have some control of their lives.
- Seek professional guidance when signs of stress seem unmanageable.

Managing your stress as a parent

We'll always have some stress in our lives, but there are steps you can take to keep it under control.

- **Make sure you take care of yourself.** Eat healthy snacks and meals, exercise and make sure you get enough sleep. Spend time doing things you enjoy.
- **Lean on your support system.** Talk things through with friends and family members who can be positive.
- **Set limits.** Say no if you or your kids can't do something. Be nice, but firm.
- **Ask for help.** Don't be afraid to get help from a health care professional if your stress levels are too high. Sometimes other health problems have symptoms similar to stress, so it's important to make sure your symptoms aren't a sign of something else.²

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Try these quick stress relievers.

You don't need a week at a spa or retreat. Just spend 15 minutes or less trying one of these stress management techniques.

1. Meditate.
2. Breathe deeply for five minutes.
3. Take in your surroundings – how the air feels on your face, how your feet feel hitting the ground.
4. Talk to a loved one.
5. Relax all your muscles, from head to toe.
6. Place a warm heat wrap around your neck and shoulders for 10 minutes.
7. Laugh out loud.
8. Listen to music.
9. Exercise.
10. Practice "gratitude." Make a list of things you are thankful for.



Sources:

- 1 American Institute of Stress (2009)
- 2 American Institute of Stress, Stress Management (March 19, 2009): stress.org
- 3 National Institute of Health's MedlinePlus, Stress in Childhood, www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002059.htm, accessed 12/16/15
- 4 www.webmd.com, 10 Relaxation Techniques That Zap Stress Fast, accessed 12/16/15