

Wellness Newsletter

Keeping Stress Levels in Perspective

MAY 2018

If you are feeling "stressed out," it may be time to do a self-inventory.

Stress can trigger a biological and psychological response. It's important to understand how your body reacts to different types of stress and when it's necessary to take steps to better protect your physical and mental health.

Types of Stress

There are two basic types of stress: eustress and distress.

Eustress produces an adrenaline (hormone) rush when it's needed to get work done or for a quick reaction, such as under fight-or-flight conditions. When a situation is uncomfortable, you may notice a temporary physical reaction such as sweaty palms, rapid heart rate, dry mouth or stammering.

Distress has a diminishing effect on health over time. Examples of longer-term stress-inducers include serious illness, death of a loved one, divorce, living with addiction, and loss of a job and/or housing. Studies show that lack of personal autonomy, trying to meet unreasonable expectations and fear of repercussions for personal decisions contribute to chronic stress.

Did You Know?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that occurs after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event such as combat, a car accident, assault, mass shooting or natural disaster. It takes time to recover from a traumatic event. Flashbacks, avoidance, negativity and jitteriness are signs of stalled recovery, or PTSD.

Signs & Symptoms of Stress

Physical

- Jaw pain, gritting or grinding teeth
- Tremors, trembling of lips, hands
- Headache, neck ache, back pain
- Light-headedness, faintness, dizziness
- Ringing, buzzing or popping sounds
- Cold or sweaty hands, feet
- Dry mouth, problems swallowing
- Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea
- Difficulty breathing, frequent sighing
- Chest pain, palpitations, rapid pulse
- Frequent urination
- Diminished sexual desire or performance
- Weight gain or loss

Emotional

- Anxiety, worry, guilt, nervousness
- Increased anger, frustration, hostility
- Feelings of loneliness or worthlessness
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Insomnia, nightmares, disturbing dreams
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion
- Feeling exhausted or overwhelmed
- Frequent crying spells or suicidal thoughts
- Little interest in appearance, punctuality
- Nervous habits, fidgeting, feet tapping
- Defensive, obsessive or compulsive behavior
- Reduced work efficiency or productivity

Health Impacts

Unmanaged stress affects mood and behavior, as well as body systems, organs and tissues. According to the [American Institute of Stress](#), physical and emotional disorders linked to stress include depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, heart attacks, stroke, skin rashes, and susceptibility to illness (including colds and flu) and certain types of disease.

Signs of poorly managed stress include difficulty sleeping, using drugs or alcohol to feel “normal,” low energy, loss of interest in daily activities and being easily irritated. Refer to the table on Page 1 for additional physical and emotional signs and symptoms.

What Can You Do?

Stress is part of life. It can't be avoided, but it can be managed. Here are eight tips:

1. Get physical exercise to produce endorphins and improve your fitness, mood and resilience.
2. Eat nutritious foods to boost your immune system. Avoid processed foods. Don't skip meals.
3. Try relaxation techniques such as yoga, tai chi, meditation and spending time close to nature.
4. Set reasonable goals, maintain good boundaries and celebrate incremental accomplishments.
5. Stay connected with family, friends and your community. Ask for support when you need it.
6. Get enough rest. Seven to nine hours of sleep is recommended for adults. Reduce distractions.
7. Carve out “me” time. Watch a movie, read, listen to music, take a bath or pursue a hobby.
8. Think positively. When faced with disappointments, look for opportunities for personal growth.

If stress is affecting your productivity and quality of life, seek professional medical and behavioral health guidance to develop a personal action plan that works for you.



Resources

[American Heart Association](#)

[American Psychological Association](#)

[National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health](#)

[National Institute of Mental Health](#)

Watch What You Eat

A healthy diet can help counteract stress-induced health effects. For example, foods that contain carbohydrates trigger production of the amino acid tryptophan. Your body converts tryptophan into the hormones serotonin and melatonin, which have calming effects. Certain minerals also have stress-reduction properties.

Studies show:

- Complex carbohydrates (whole grains) prompt release of serotonin.
- Vitamin C in fruits and vegetables helps curb stress hormone levels.
- Magnesium in leafy vegetables counteracts headaches and fatigue.
- Potassium helps lower your blood pressure; try eating avocados.
- Omega-3 fatty acids in fish reduce release of stress hormones.
- Brewed black tea may help lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.
- Nuts and seeds contain fats that promote healthy levels of cholesterol.
- Calcium may ease anxiety and reduce mood swings.