



Protect your health by managing stress

When demands on our time, energy, and resources challenge us, we experience stress. A little stress can be harmless and may even be helpful, but ongoing stress can put your health at risk. Understanding the different types of stress and knowing how to manage them can help you take care of your health.



Stress may start as something harmless

Stress is a part of life and affects everyone. Short-term hassles and stressful situations, such as being stuck in traffic or dealing with a leaky pipe, can be harmless. Stress can even help you focus your energy and effort toward performing your best or overcoming a challenge. For example, when you have to:

- Act quickly in an emergency.
- Meet a deadline.
- Solve a problem.
- Avoid an accident.

If you start to experience too many of these situations at the same time, however, it can lead to unhealthy stress.



Long-term stress can damage your health

Stress that builds up or lasts too long takes a toll on your health and well-being. Constant worry affects your job, relationships, and enjoyment of life. Long-term stress can weaken your immune system and make you feel tired and short-tempered.

Studies show a link between stress and health problems, including:

- **Heart disease:** Chronic stress can worsen high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. Stress can trigger spasms that block blood flow to the heart, resulting in chest pain and possibly heart attack.
- **Digestive problems:** When you're stressed, your body produces more stomach acid. This worsens stomach ulcer symptoms and makes it harder for ulcers to heal.
- **Asthma:** For people with asthma, stress often triggers an attack.
- **Anxiety or depression:** Stress can worsen feelings of anxiety or depression.
- **Obesity:** When stressed, many people tend to overeat, which leads to weight gain.
- **Memory problems:** Memory problems and forgetfulness can be signs of too much stress.
- **Skin problems:** Stress can make the skin more sensitive, which could worsen psoriasis and other skin conditions.



Stress warning signs

It's important to know when your stress level is too high. Find a way to lower your stress when you experience warning signs such as:

- Chest, neck, or back pain
- Frequent bad temper or sadness
- Headaches
- Inability to focus or remember things
- Lack of energy
- Muscle tension
- Nail biting, teeth grinding, or jaw clenching
- Skin breakouts
- Skipping meals and other eating and drinking problems
- Sleep problems
- Upset stomach



Reduce your stress

Here are two ways to lower stress:

1. Improve situations that you can control:

- Set realistic expectations on what you can do.
- Plan ahead to prevent problems.
- Prioritize what's important when many things need your attention.
- Ask for help from family and friends.

2. Find ways to manage stress:

- Try relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and meditation.
- Start an aerobic exercise routine.
- Confide in trusted friends or loved ones.

If you're finding it hard to cope with stress, call your doctor or a mental health professional. They can guide you on how to respond effectively to stressful situations and help you generate positive thoughts and feelings.

