

Stress & How to Manage It

When you are stressed, you may experience the following:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- A rise in blood pressure
- Enhanced focus and reaction time

Stress is a physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance. Your body's response to stress involves your nervous system releasing hormones to alert the body for action.

Stress can be a good thing because it enhances your ability to work under pressure, react to danger or motivate you to do your best. However, when you are constantly running in a stressful mode, it can be wearing on your body; affect your cognitive, emotional and physical abilities; and cause behavioral changes.

Symptoms of Prolonged Stress

Physical

Aches and pains, diarrhea or constipation, dizziness or nausea, chest pain, frequent colds, high blood pressure, digestive problems, sleep problems, autoimmune diseases, obesity, pain, skin conditions (such as eczema)

Cognitive

Memory problems, inability to concentrate, poor judgment, seeing only the negative, anxious or racing thoughts, constant worrying

Emotional

Moodiness, irritability or short temper, agitation, inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness or isolation, depression, general unhappiness

Behavioral

Eating more or less than normal or recommended, sleeping too much or too little, isolating yourself from others, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax, nervous habits

Causes of Stress

Stress can be caused by a number of different factors.

It can be external (related to something in your environment), or it can be internally related.

Common external causes

- Major life changes
- Work
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial problems
- Being too busy
- Children and family

Common internal causes

- Inability to accept uncertainty
- Pessimism
- Negative self-talk
- Unrealistic expectations
- Perfectionism
- Lack of assertiveness

Stress & How to Manage It

Is stress normal?

Stress is a normal physical response to being overstimulated, overworked or pressured by everyday life or by major life challenges. Stress affects millions of Americans each day and may lead to significant mental and emotional difficulties. Nearly 1 million American employees miss work each day because of stress and stress-related illness.

Stress is a natural part of life. The key to coping with stress is to know your tolerance for stressful situations and have strategies to accept or change those situations. It is also important to identify the causes of stress in your life so you can anticipate when stress will occur and take steps to prevent or remedy it.

SELF Program

Don't forget, the Strive Employee Life and Family (SELF) program through ComPsych provides a variety of services to help you manage stress. Whether your stress stems from a personal problem, financial or legal issue, problems at work or in a relationship, the SELF Program offers counseling, referral and consultation services.

To learn more about what the SELF program can do for you, visit www.mchcp.org. You can also log in to your myMCHCP account and select the SELF Program logo, or call ComPsych at any time, 24/7, at 800-808-2261.

myStrength

myStrength is a personal wellness tool through Anthem that provides 24/7 access to mood tracking, daily inspiration, motivational messages and more. Find more information in the Engage app, or by logging in to your Anthem account.

References:

1. Segal, J., Smith, M., Segal, R., Robinson, L. (2021, April). Stress Symptoms, Signs and Causes. Retrieved from www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-symptoms-causes-and-effects.htm (Retrieved April 16, 2021)
2. Mental Health America (2021) Coping with Stress Checklist. Retrieved from www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/coping-stress-checklist

Managing Stress

Use these tips to help manage stress in your daily life.

1. Take one thing at a time.

Pick one task and work on it. When that's done, move on to the next.

2. Be realistic.

Set goals that won't overwhelm you or add stress.

3. Don't try to be a superhero.

No one is perfect. Don't expect perfection from yourself.

4. Visualize.

Use your imagination to see how you can manage a stressful situation at work or home.

5. Meditate.

Five to ten minutes of quiet reflection can bring relief. On a stressful day, close your door and meditate or go for a quick walk to clear your mind.

6. Exercise.

Thirty minutes of physical activity per day helps both body and mind. Use your breaks or lunch at work for a quick walk. Make plans to do this a few times a week.

7. Hobbies.

Take a break and do something you enjoy.

8. Adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Get adequate rest, eat right, exercise, limit your use of caffeine and alcohol and balance work and play.

9. Share your feelings.

Don't try to cope alone. Let friends, family or a health care professional provide support and guidance.

10. Be flexible!

Whether you're at home or at work, arguing only increases stress. If you feel you're right, stand your ground, but do so calmly and rationally. Be prepared to allow for others' opinions and to compromise.

11. Don't be overly critical.

Remember, everyone has his or her own virtues and shortcomings.