1. What Is Stress?

Stress is the way you react to events that change (good, bad, real, or even imagined).

These are ways the body responds to stress:
- Pupils dilate (get wider).
- Breathing speeds up.
- Heart rate speeds up.
- Oxygen increases in the blood.
- Blood moves to major muscles.
- Blood pressure rises.
- Muscles tense.
- Sweating occurs.
- Blood sugar increases.
- Abstract thinking goes down.

Stress can make you more productive. It can also help you respond to threats to your safety, such as being near a fire.

High levels of stress, though, can make you less productive. When left unchecked, stress can lead to health problems. These include:

- Heartburn
- Back or neck pain
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- A lowering of the body’s immune system

In fact, the American Academy of Family Physicians states that about two-thirds of all visits to the family doctor are stress-related.

2. Good Health Habits


3. Prevent Burnout

You can get burnout from work or anything that takes more energy than you can give. Burnout is not a one-time event. It builds over time. The saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” applies to burnout.

Tips to Help Prevent Burnout

- Set career and personal goals that can be achieved. Attempt to do well, but don’t try to be perfect.
- Follow good health habits. (See topic 2.)
- Try not to spread yourself too thin. Delicate tasks at work and at home to lessen your load. Learn to say, “No.”
- Prioritize what you need to get done in a day, a week, etc.
- Reduce long work or study hours, if you can. The more you do and the less you rest, the more likely burnout will occur.
- If you feel overwhelmed with your workload, discuss this with your boss.
- Discuss feelings and problems you are having with friends, family, and coworkers. Talking helps to ease feelings of frustration that feed burnout. If things don’t get better, get help.
- Take regular 5 to 10 minute relaxation breaks. Take mental breaks from stressful situations, too. Learn to meditate and practice relaxation techniques. (See “Relaxation responses,” topic 6.)
- Make time for leisure activities that you enjoy. Do these daily or at least every week.
- Plan one or more vacations during the year. Don’t work on your vacation.

4. Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises must relax in 4 ways.

1. They tense and relax muscles. Taking a deep breath tenses muscles used for breathing. A deep exhalation relieves them.
2. They allow more oxygen to be absorbed. This assists the body’s response to stress. It also helps the body recover from stress.
3. They increase the amount of oxygen, which allows the heart to slow down. This helps calm you.
4. They give you the chance to pause and plan your response to something that causes stress.

Tips:

- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Try not to spread yourself too thin. Delegate tasks.
- Take regular 5 to 10 minute relaxation breaks. Take mental breaks from stressful situations, too. Learn to meditate and practice relaxation techniques. (See “Relaxation responses,” topic 6.)
- Make time for leisure activities that you enjoy. Do these daily or at least every week.
- Plan one or more vacations during the year. Don’t work on your vacation.

Eat Healthy

- Eat at regular times. Don’t skip meals. If you snack, choose healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, almonds, walnuts, and whole-grain cereals.
- Avoid “junk foods” – ones high in fat and sugar.
- Limit caffeine. It can cause anxiety.
- If you drink alcohol, do it in moderation. This is up to 2 drinks for men and 1 drink for women and pregnant women 65 and older. One drink is 12 oz. of regular beer, 4 oz. of wine, or 1 oz. of 80-proof whiskey, gin, etc.
- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water each day.

Purifying Sighing Steps

1. Keep your shoulders erect.
2. Let out a big sigh, making a sound of relief as the air leaves your mouth.
3. Close it to 10 or 15 times, one after the other.
4. Note: If you are prone to hyperventilating, do not do this breathing exercise.

Relaxation Response Steps

1. Choose a quiet place that is free of distraction. Turn off the telephone. Ask for privacy.
2. Sit in a comfortable position so there is no extra tension in your muscles. You can even sit down if you choose to relax. Your feet should touch the floor. Do not lie down. You may fall asleep.
3. Close your eyes gently. Don’t squeeze them closed. Expect to feel very relaxed.
4. Repeat the sound “oum” or any other one-syllable word. Say it silently and over and over for 15 minutes. There is no right or wrong way to do this. You can repeat the word quickly or slowly. Do whatever comes naturally.
5. When thoughts distract you, ignore them. Return to the sound “oum.” These other thoughts are supposed to occur. Let them go. This shows the release of stress.
6. Biofeedback
Biofeedback uses special machines to monitor stress responses, such as heart rate, sweating, etc. While hooked up to biofeedback devices, you learn to control your body’s automatic responses to stress. Then you learn to do this without the machines.

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7. Thought Control Techniques

Thought Stopping
Use this when you are obsessed with negative thoughts. If work problems dominate your thoughts, picture an “off-duty” sign for the stop sign.

1. Isolate the stressful thought.
2. Close your eyes. Brevly focus on the stressful thought.
3. Shut “Stop!”
4. Open your eyes. Note how refreshed you feel.

“Rehearse” for Stressful Events

Stage actors rehearse their lines before a play. You can rehearse how you want to deal during events, etc. that cause stress for you. This helps you relax when the “event” actually takes place. Follow these steps:

1. Close your eyes and unwind. Release all the tension
   in your muscles.
2. For a minute or two, focus on relaxing.
3. For 10 to 15 minutes, think about how to relax,
   as a dog or cat, appears to cut down the effects
   of stress on health.
4. Picture an “off-duty” sign for the stop sign.
5. Open your eyes. Note how refreshed you feel.

More Tips

- Laugh a bit. Laughter releases tension. It’s hard to feel stress in the middle of a belly laugh.
- Take a shower or bath with warm water. This will soothe and calm your nerves and muscles.
- Listen to soothing music in a quiet, calm place. Focus on the calmness of the music. When the music ends, you should feel more relaxed.
- Reward yourself with things that make you feel good. Get a massage. Buy a picnic in the park. Give yourself some “me” time.

- Help others. This takes the focus off of you and puts it on the needs of others.
- Have a good cry. Tears can help cleanse the body of substances that form under stress. Tears also release a natural pain-relieving substance from the brain.

8. Other Tips to Manage Stress

- Savor its soothing warmth and aroma.
- Have a cup of warm herbal tea. Sip it slowly and enjoy the moment. The warmth is a natural pain-relieving substance from the brain.
- Focus on the calmness of the music. When the music ends, you should feel more relaxed.
- Take a walk, listen to soothing music in a quiet, calm place.
- Listen to soothing music in a quiet, calm place. Focus on the calmness of the music. When the music ends, you should feel more relaxed.

9. Reasons to Call Your Doctor or Provider

For any of the problems listed below, call your doctor or health care provider. You will get advice on what to do.

- Anxiety
- Nervousness
- Crying spells
- Confusion about how to handle your problems
- You abuse alcohol and/or drugs (illegal or prescribed)
- You have been a part of a traumatic event in the past (e.g., armed combat, airplane crash, rape, or assault) and you now have any of these problems:
  - Flashbacks (you relive the stressful event)
  - Nightmares
  - Feelings of emotionless numbness and detached from others and the outside world
  - Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
  - Anxiety and/or depression
- You suffer from a medical illness that you are unable to cope with or that leads you to neglect proper treatment.
- You withdraw from friends, relatives, and coworkers and/or yell at them even when you are only slightly annoyed.

For More Information, Contact:
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
800.232.4636  •  www.cdc.gov/niosh

Get Free Health Information, from: www.HealthyLearn.com