



Effects of Stress on Health & Weight

You're running around the house. It is 7:30 AM, the kids still need breakfast, the dog needs let out, your spouse is calling to remind you about the PTA conference tonight, and you have a meeting that begins promptly at 8:00 AM. You may be feeling a bit of stress at this point. The last thing on your mind is how your stress level is affecting your physical health. In all reality, your stress level affects your body along with your thoughts and feelings.

Effects of Stress on the Body

Everyone experiences some level of stress. However, extreme or chronic stress can affect your body by increasing risks for the following:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Headaches
- Insomnia

Effects on Your Digestive System

Stress affects many different parts of the body. One of these areas is your digestive system. Your liver can produce extra blood sugar to increase your energy. Chronic stress may inhibit your body from keeping up with this extra glucose surge and increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Excessive hormones, rapid breathing, and increased heart rate can also upset your digestive system. Heartburn and/or acid reflux may arise due to an increase in stomach acid. Chronic stress can also lead to a higher risk for ulcers. Stress can also affect the way food moves through your body, leading to diarrhea or constipation.

Effects on Your Muscular System

Under stress, your muscles tense up to protect themselves from injury. Usually, they will relax again once you relax, but if you're constantly under stress, your muscles may not get the chance to relax. Tight muscles cause headaches, back and [shoulder](#) pain, and body aches. Over time, this can set off an unhealthy cycle as you may stop exercising and turn to pain medication for relief.

Effects on Your Immune System

Stress stimulates the immune system, which can be a plus for immediate situations. This stimulation can help you avoid infections and heal wounds. But over time, stress hormones will weaken your immune system and reduce your body's response to foreign invaders. People under chronic stress are more susceptible to viral illnesses like the flu and the common cold, as well as other infections. Stress can also increase the time it takes you to recover from an illness or injury.

a sense of doom

Anxiety can cause frequent feelings of impending doom. You may also have difficulty concentrating.

panic attacks

Panic attacks from anxiety can lead to a number of physical symptoms, including heart palpitations, chest pain, and lightheadedness. You may even feel warmer than normal.

depression

Chronic anxiety can increase your risk for depression. Symptoms include social withdrawal, loss of interest in activities you once loved, and feelings of guilt or hopelessness.

headaches

Headaches from constant worry and stress are common.

irritability

Constant worry can increase your overall feelings of irritability.

pounding heart

Heart palpitations occur with panic attacks, but they can also happen with anxiety more generally. You may feel like your heartbeat quickens in pace and intensity.

breathing problems

Anxiety can cause rapid, shallow breathing. These symptoms are more intense when you're having a panic attack.

loss of libido

Anxiety can decrease your sexual desire.

upset stomach

Stomach pains may be accompanied by nausea and diarrhea.

extreme fatigue

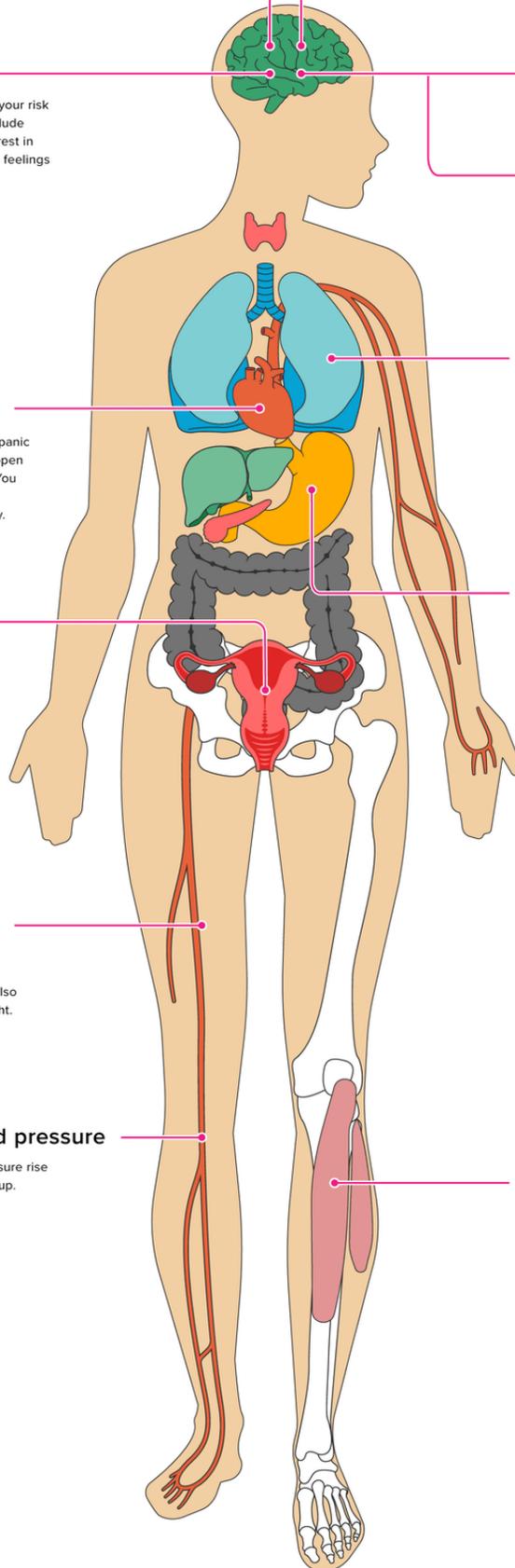
Anxiety can leave you feeling wiped out at various points throughout the day. You may also have problems sleeping at night.

increase in blood pressure

You may feel your blood pressure rise whenever your anxiety flares up.

muscle aches and other pains

Anxiety isn't just felt mentally. Unexplained aches and pains can also occur.





AHW Lesson Activities

Effects of Stress

“Applying the Lesson”

Choose one of the following activities to apply what you learned about your health and your healthy goal setting. Write a short paragraph (3 to 5 sentences) to describe what you did and learned from the activity selected. Report your Applying the Lesson results by Online form, email, fax or hard copy to your county Extension Office.

Option 1: What are some of your major stressors in life? What are some ways to help ease your tension around those topics?

Option 2: Pick one activity this week you enjoy and helps you wind down. How does engaging in this activity help to alleviate some of your stress?

Option 3: The next time you feel stressed, practice deep breathing. See instructions below. How does this deep breathing affect your stress level and symptoms of stress?

1. Get comfortable. Lie on your back in bed or on the floor with a pillow under your head and knees. Or sit in a chair with your shoulders, head, and neck supported against the back of the chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Let your belly fill with air.
3. Breathe out through your nose.
4. Place one hand on your belly. Place the other hand on your chest.
5. As you breathe in, feel your belly rise. As you breathe out, feel your belly lower. The hand on your belly should move more than the one on your chest.
6. Take three more full, deep breaths. Breathe fully into your belly as it rises and falls with each breath.