



Live More -- Stress Less

Everyone experiences stress in life. Some stress can be healthy and give you a sense of purpose. But, extended periods of high stress can have negative effects on your body and your health. Managing your life can become a very stressful task. Balancing work, family and finances puts a lot on a person. Let's learn more about stress, the causes and symptoms of stress, and how to cope with stress.

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. It's something that causes a state of strain or tension. It can be a good thing, like the birth of a baby or a promotion at work or a new job. However, we tend to think of stress in the negative and the things that challenge us mentally or emotionally, as well as physically.



Recognizing early warning signs: Do you ever experience any of these symptoms? Do they affect how you function in daily life? Do they affect your state of health or wellbeing?

- ✓ Physical: fatigue, aching muscles, shortness of breath, cramps
- ✓ Behavioral: Insomnia, forgetfulness, nail-biting, nervousness
- ✓ Emotional: Anxiety, irritable, depression, no emotional control

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, and insomnia.

Effects on Your Digestive System

A spike of adrenaline causes your liver to produce extra blood sugar to increase your energy for fight or flight of the threat. Chronic stress may inhibit your body from keeping up with these extra glucose surges and increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Excessive hormones, rapid breathing, and increased heart rate can also upset your digestive system. Heartburn 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 release 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 to 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.

Techniques to control stress: Some coping strategies center on planning and organizational skills. While others may focus more on controlling thoughts, attitudes, emotions and behaviors. Control events: plan ahead and set priorities. Having a schedule always eases the mind. Control Attitudes - list accomplishments, set realistic daily goals. Control Responses: take care of your body, think positive, and relax before bed.

Healthy living can reduce stress: There are several effective ways to manage your stress and help alleviate the negative effects on your health.



- Maintain healthy diet - your body works better. Don't succumb to carb cravings or binge eating.
- Balance work and recreation- don't take every day and everything too serious. Make time for yourself and your family/friends/pets.
- Exercise 20 minutes or more a day- exercise is a great stress reliever.
- Maintain a sense of humor
- Make time for hobbies or things you enjoy doing
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Limiting internet use and television will also help lower stress levels.
- Get enough sleep at night. Adequate sleep may help alleviate symptoms of stress.

Stress relieving exercises

Utilize relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, tai chi or massage. If you can't get away from a stressful situation, here are a few actions you can take in as little as 5 minutes to bring some relief.

Deep Breathing: Take 10 deep breaths, breathe in and hold it for a few seconds then release slowly. Repeat.

Neck Rolls: These reduce the amount of tension that gets built up in your neck muscles. Keeping your shoulders level, drop your chin to your chest and slowly roll your head in circles, switch directions at any time.

Stand up and Stretch: Stand up and reach your hands high above your head, then reach down to your toes (knees bent to prevent strain).

Unknot Your Back: Sit on the edge of your chair with your feet flat on the floor. Lean forward and put your chest onto your knees, hands and head hanging loosely. Breathe deeply. Slowly roll your back, vertebrae by vertebrae until you feel relief in your back.

Relax Completely: Lie on the floor or sit back in a comfortable chair. Keep your hands at your side or on the arms of the chair. Beginning with your toes and going all the way up to your scalp, visualize/sense each part of your body and tell it to relax. Take your time. Go back over any area that becomes tense again until finally your whole body is relaxed.

Not all stress is negative. Some stress triggers the flight or fight response in your brain. This response helps keep you safe and responsive. Remember your physical health and stress level also affect your emotions. *Be kind to yourself.*

Additional Resources:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/stress/effects-on-body#1>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-body>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>

<https://www.chhs.colostate.edu/krnc/monthly-blog/tips-for-healthy-eating-to-help-manage-stress/>



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

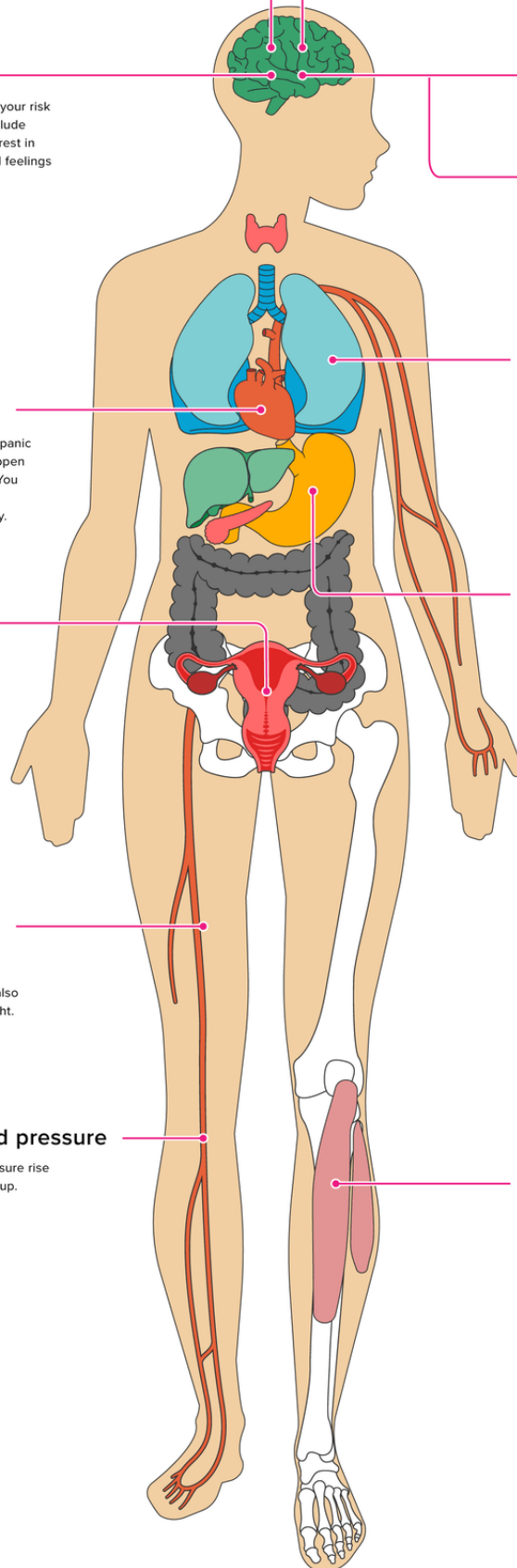
Anxiety can leave you feeling wiped out at various points throughout the day. You may also have problems sleeping at night.

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

Live More, Stress Less

“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 response (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: As you experience a stressful situation, select one or more from the list of Stress Relieving Exercise listed on page 2 of the lesson. How does this activity affect your stress level and symptoms of stress?

Option 2: What are some of your major stressors in life? What are some ways to help ease your tension around those topics?

Option 3: Your key to distressing: 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?