



How Can I Manage Stress?

Stress makes your body release a hormone called adrenaline. This hormone can temporarily speed up your breathing and heart rate and raise your blood pressure. These reactions prepare you to deal with the situation — the “fight or flight” response.

Chronic, or long-term, stress is when stress is constant and your body is in high gear on and off for days or weeks at a time. Chronic stress may lead to high blood pressure, which can increase the risk for heart attack and stroke.

It’s important to recognize how stress affects you, learn how to deal with it and develop healthy habits to reduce your stress.



How can stress affect me?

Stress affects each of us in different ways. What’s stressful to one person may not be to another. Stress can cause poor health behaviors that are linked to heart disease and stroke. It can also have physical signs and emotional effects.

Stress may contribute to poor health behaviors such as:

- Smoking or smoking more than normal
- Overeating
- Being physically inactive
- Eating an unhealthy diet
- Becoming overweight
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Not taking medications as prescribed

Chronic stress may cause physical and emotional issues, such as:

- Digestive problems
- Anxiety and depression
- Headaches

- Trouble sleeping
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration issues
- High blood pressure

How can I manage stress?

Finding ways to manage stress is important for your physical health and mental well-being. Here are some things that can help you manage stress:

- **Use positive self-talk.** Turn negative thoughts into positive ones. Instead of saying “I can’t do this,” say “I’ll do my best.”
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity can relieve stress, tension, anxiety and depression. Consider a brisk walk, hike or bike ride.
- **Make time for friends and family.** It’s important to maintain social connections and talk with people you trust.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adults should aim for an average of seven to nine hours a night.

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- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Try deep breathing while listening to music, meditating or doing yoga.
- **Do a hobby you enjoy.** It can be fun and distract you from negative thoughts or worries.

Identify sources of stress in your life and look for ways to reduce and manage them.

How can I reduce the amount of stress in my life?

Everyone gets stressed sometimes, but you can identify effective ways to manage or reduce the amount of stress in your life. Here are some things that may help reduce your daily stress:

- Think ahead about things that might bother you and plan how to deal with them.
- Avoid things that you know cause you stress, such as rush-hour traffic.
- Learn to say “no” if you don’t have time to do something. Don’t promise too much to others.
- Plan your time wisely to get important things done without rushing.
- Stay organized with to-do lists and tackle big tasks one step at a time.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at SupportNetwork.heart.org.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How can family and friends help?

Are there relaxation techniques you would recommend?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.