

# Stress Management

Stress is a word that gets used a lot. But what is stress really about?

Stress is not an event, but a person's **reaction** to that event. How you respond to the good and bad events in your life determines how much stress you experience. What one person perceives as a stressful event, another person may look upon as a welcome challenge.

The feeling that we call "stress" frequently results from a lack of control over one's circumstances. For example, you cannot control the traffic jam that makes you late for work, but you can control how you react to it. You can get angry and let it ruin your day, or you can chalk it up to life in the city and use the time to mentally streamline your morning schedule.

## Stress Symptoms

When you perceive an event as stressful, chemical changes in your body may result in physical and emotional reactions, including:

- Muscle tension/headaches
- Heartburn/gastrointestinal problems
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Blaming others for problems



- Withdrawal from friends and family, crying, or depression
- Nervousness/anxiety
- Fatigue/low energy
- Forgetfulness, confusion, or feeling overwhelmed

Medical research shows that prolonged or multiple stress symptoms may lead to health problems, such as an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, ulcers, cancer, depression, and other mental health disorders.

## Thought Patterns and Stress

Thought patterns that may contribute to a stress reaction include:

- Exaggerating a problem or making it seem worse than it is
- Thinking in "black and white" or generalizing

- Focusing on the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring possible good outcomes

Some thinking patterns that can help you to deal more effectively with stress include:

- Accepting that you cannot control many of the situations that cause you stress
- Concentrating on what you can control, while letting go of guilt or frustration over events that are outside of your influence
- Placing a priority on the people and tasks that are most important to your life, work, and overall well-being

### Managing Your Stress

No matter how positive your thinking becomes, there will be times when you will experience stress. It is often easier to manage your reaction to the stressful events you encounter if you:

- Exercise 20-30 minutes 4-5 days a week
- Eat regular, balanced meals, and reduce your salt, sugar, and fat intake
- Take a step back from the stressful situation by doing something that helps you relax, such as taking a long walk by yourself, reading a

book, or talking to a trusted friend

- Learn how to say “no” to unreasonable demands on your time
- Schedule your time realistically and avoid procrastination
- Plan ahead — when you are anticipating a stressful event or situation, consider ways to cope with your reaction before you actually begin to experience it

It's important to remember that stress is not always negative. Positive life changes such as the birth of a child or a promotion at work are usually full of stressful moments. Stress can challenge us to grow as people or motivate us to make healthy changes in how we live each day.

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