



Chronic stress may be the ultimate risk factor—some experts think it causes 50% of all disease. Evaluate your own stress, and learn some ways to reduce stress in your life.

All Stressed Up & Nowhere To Go?

WELCOA's Health & Wellness BROCHURES

Coping With Stress



BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska

Here's what they found:

- ▶ People who had been under severe stress for one to six months were twice as likely to get sick.
- ▶ Those who suffered from two or more years of severe stress were four times more likely to develop colds.
- ▶ Those with the most relationships—family, friends, and community—were the least likely to catch colds.

Ever wonder why some people catch all the colds that go around, and others don't? In one study, researchers took 276 healthy volunteers and measured their stress levels, then put cold viruses in their noses.

Stress is Sickening... Literally!

Others are upset by changes in their routines. But everyone can benefit by learning stress-reduction techniques and using them in their daily lives.

The fact is, we all experience stress every day, but people vary in how they handle it. Some people thrive on change, such as getting a new job, moving or assuming additional responsibilities.

- ▶ **PHYSICAL**—Lack of sleep, possible poor diet, obligations;
- ▶ **SOCIAL**—Job pressures, family demands, social weather;
- ▶ **ENVIRONMENT**—Traffic, pollution, noise, and stress from several sources:

In this all too common scenario you'd be experiencing stress from several sources:

What do we have for dinner? I've got to call Mel. . . AND get the laundry started or I'll be up late again tonight! What did she mean by "that new procedure" was going to be a challenge? Does she think I can't do it? They say it may freeze. Are the hoses disconnected?

Me? Stressed?

Driving home from work with 18 minutes to get to the kid's school program and traffic has slowed to a crawl. My thoughts are racing:

For More Information

International Stress Management Association

www.isma.org.uk

MedlinePlus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html>

A PUBLICATION OF



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PRIORITY #1!
Review the list below and check all items that apply to you. Do you see a pattern? Is a certain situation or person causing you undue stress? Think about it as you learn about the stress management techniques inside.

STRESS SYMPTOMS

PHYSICAL

- upset stomach
- trouble sleeping
- trouble eating habits
- poor eating habits
- excessive drinking

BEHAVIORAL

- poor diet
- not enough exercise
- pressure at work
- health problems
- worry about children
- too much driving
- financial problems

STRESSORS

- criticizing others a lot
- working too much
- becoming a loner
- getting into arguments
- drug use
- driving too fast
- poor eating habits
- excessive drinking

MENTAL

- exhaustion
- headaches
- constipation
- backaches
- tight chest or throat
- accidents and injuries
- trouble sleeping
- trouble eating habits
- upset stomach

EMOTIONAL

- repetitive thoughts
- making errors
- scary thoughts
- forgetfulness
- decisions
- difficulty making
- trouble concentrating
- financial problems
- personal relationship issues
- overweight
- working too many hours
- caretaking for an elder
- no quiet time
- conflict with a co-worker
- bored with routine
- conflict with family
- member
- noisy environment
- sexual problems
- nobody to talk to
- other

▶ Stress about intimate relationships doubled cold risk.
▶ Stress from unemployment or underemployment made sufferers three and a half times more likely to start sniffing.

WELCOA's Health & Wellness BROCHURES

Stress & Health

Long-Term Stress Is Bad For Your Health

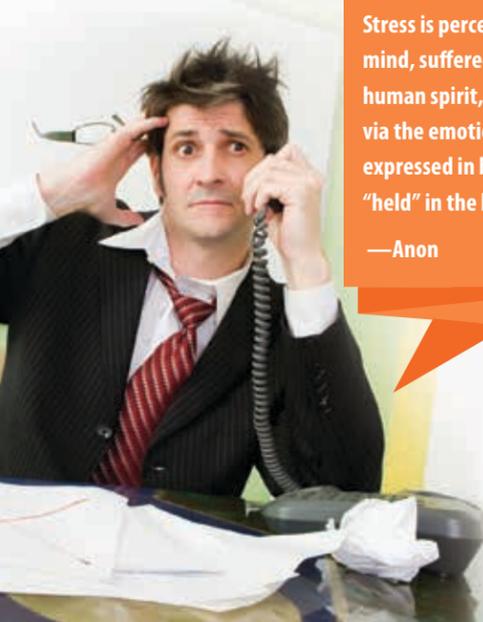
Some experts think that stress may cause 50% of all disease. Stress contributes to the first and second leading causes of death—heart disease and cancer. It's also a factor in migraines, digestive problems, mental illness, chronic insomnia, fatigue, high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, ulcers, tooth decay, and the common cold.

We're not talking about having one bad day. It's chronic stress—day in, day out—which can harm your immune system, making you more prone to accidents, illness, and plain old unhappiness.

Many of us have come to accept stress as normal—isn't everyone stressed out these days? That doesn't make it okay. Take a look at your stress levels, what causes your stress, and what you can do about it.

Stress is perceived in the mind, suffered in the human spirit, experienced via the emotions, expressed in behavior, and "held" in the body.

—Anon





Stress Management Skills

You certainly can't eliminate all stress from your life, but you can effectively manage stress with proven techniques and skills.

Adjust Your Attitude

RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU CAN'T CHANGE If you had the power, you'd change all sorts of things—at work, about yourself and family members, in your community and the world. Sort out which problems you can solve, and which are truly beyond your control. Work on accepting the things you can't change. Learn to mentally say, "Oh, well. So it goes."

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS If you find yourself angry at the same situations over and over, maybe it's time to look at your expectations. A co-worker who is always late with her work is unlikely to change. Can you learn from experience, and plan around her? If your son would rather read than play basketball, can you give up your dreams of him in the NBA? You can save a lot of stress and conflict by being realistic.

REPLACE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WITH POSITIVE ONES "I'll never get this right." Negative self-talk tends to come true—or at least make life a lot harder. Be your own coach. Tell yourself "If I keep at this, I'll figure it out." Encourage your family and co-workers—positive attitudes are contagious.

THINK ABOUT THE BIG PICTURE Ask yourself: Will this matter in a year? What do other people do when they have this problem? Is this something time may help?

RECOGNIZE CHOICES We get in the habit of thinking that we have to live with things as they are. But remember: you always have options. Could you speak up, or change things, or say no, or stop? Could you ask someone else to do it? Let's be honest here, you have a lot more options than you think you have—exercising them can significantly reduce your stress.

Work It Out!

Exercise is probably the simplest, most popular stress-reliever and antidepressant available. Aerobic exercise for half an hour several times a week does great things for your mood, your heart, and your waistline. It reduces the risk of many diseases and produces endorphins, natural brain chemicals that make you feel good and decrease pain.

The easiest way to get started is with brisk walking outdoors or on a treadmill. As your fitness improves, you may want to try jogging, bicycling, swimming, aerobics classes, or cross-country skiing. See your doctor before starting a fitness program.

Try This!

DEEP BREATHING You can do this almost anywhere, anytime. The trick is to remember to do it! Inhale through your nose as you count to four. Let your abdomen expand. Exhale slowly through your mouth as you count to eight, letting tension leave your body with your breath. Repeat for a minute or two. Your muscles will relax, and your cells will perk up from the extra oxygen. Repeat whenever you feel tense.

YOGA Yoga can improve circulation and memory and lower blood pressure and heart rate. The exercises revitalize your inner organs and stretch your muscles and spine. Most classes combine physical exercises, breathing exercises, and meditation.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION Sit or lie down in a quiet place and tense, then relax each muscle group in your body—even your face. Then breathe slowly and deeply for a few minutes. Audio tapes which guide you may be helpful—find them at bookstores.

MEDITATION Sit quietly, close your eyes, and relax your body. Silently repeat a pleasant word like "relax." When thoughts come, let them go and return to repeating your word. Continue for 10 or 20 minutes. Stop repeating the word. Sit quietly for another minute or two, open your eyes, and feel refreshed.

STRETCHING EXERCISES Tense muscles really appreciate a stretch. Here are a few you can do in a chair.

Fingers: Separate and stretch out your fingers for 10 seconds. Curl your fingers at the knuckles and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat first stretch.

Shoulders: Lift your shoulders toward your ears and hold a few seconds, then relax.

Forearms: Extend one arm straight out, palm up. Gently bend back the extended hand with your other hand.

Neck: Tilt your head to one side and hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat on other side.

Upper Back: Clasp your hands behind your head, elbows out, and squeeze your shoulder blades together for 10 seconds. Relax.

Walking: Nature is truly a great healer, and walking has tremendous health benefits. In a recent study, brisk walking for at least a half hour only six times a month reduced the death rate of participating adults by 43%. To step out into nature and notice the plants and trees is to rejoin the original health club. With no monthly fee!

Get Your Zzzzzz's

Most adults simply don't get the recommended 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night. Moreover, some experts predict a continuing decline, thanks to distractions like e-mail, instant and text messaging, and online shopping. Mood, memory, and your ability to pay attention and make good decisions take a nose dive as sleep deficits grow. It's downright dangerous—23% of us admitted to falling asleep at the wheel in the past year. Make yourself get to bed at a reasonable hour.

If you have trouble sleeping, try these suggestions:

- > Program your body clock by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day;
- > Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine in the late afternoon and evening;
- > Get outside in the daylight every day;
- > Don't use sleep aids containing antihistamines;
- > Keep a cool bedroom—60-65° F is ideal;
- > Exercise regularly for longer, deeper sleep;
- > Remove the TV—reserve the bedroom for sleep only;
- > Eat a light carbohydrate snack before bed;
- > Move your bedside clock out of sight, especially if it's illuminated;
- > Create a "nesting ritual" at bedtime, perhaps including a warm bath or soft music to prepare you for sleep;
- > If you can't fall asleep after a half hour, get up and leave the bedroom until you feel sleepy; and
- > See your doctor if you have chronic trouble sleeping or are drowsy in the daytime. A diagnosis of the underlying cause is important, and treatments are available.

Set Goals!

People can withstand enormous stress for a good cause. Think of the people you admire. Has life always been easy for them? They've gotten through the hard parts because they kept their purpose in mind.

On the other hand, life can seem pretty meaningless if you're just going through the motions, bored and going nowhere.

What are your goals and dreams? Are you moving towards them?

Take an hour and write down your goals, from the most humble to the most important. Think of small steps you could take to move towards what you want. Make plans and follow through.

Extra work does not always mean extra stress, if it makes your dreams come true.

