

# STRESSED OUT? BREATHE IN.

Learn what you can do to help manage your stress.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. But what is stress? How does it affect your health? And what can you do about it?

## What is stress?\*

Stress is your body's way of protecting itself from harmful situations. When you feel stressed, your brain becomes more alert, your muscles tense, and your pulse increases. This can make it easier for you to complete a difficult task, like a test or a job interview. That means that not all stress is bad stress.

## In fact, there are two kinds of stress

1

**Acute stress:** You feel this when you slam on the breaks, have a fight with your partner or ski down a steep slope. It's a short-term stress that goes away quickly.

2

**Chronic stress:** You may feel this if you have money problems, an unhappy marriage or trouble at work. Any type of stress that goes on for weeks or months is considered chronic.

## How does stress affect your health?\*

When you have chronic stress, your body stays alert, even though there is no danger. Over time, this puts you at risk for health problems, including:

- › High blood pressure
- › Heart disease
- › Diabetes
- › Obesity
- › Depression or anxiety
- › Skin problems, such as acne or eczema
- › Menstrual problems

Plus, if you already have a health condition, chronic stress can make it worse.

Together, all the way.®



## What can you do to manage stress?

A few practical steps can reduce the impact stress has on your health.

**1. Recognize the signs.** Look for these symptoms, especially if you're feeling pressured by daily responsibilities; are going through a sudden negative change, like losing a job or a spouse; or if you've experienced a traumatic event.\*\*

- › Diarrhea or constipation
- › Feeling angry or depressed
- › Forgetfulness
- › Frequent aches and pains
- › Headaches
- › Lack of energy or focus
- › Sexual problems
- › Stiff jaw or neck
- › Tiredness
- › Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- › Upset stomach
- › Use of alcohol or drugs to relax
- › Weight loss or gain

**2. Get regular exercise.** Just 30 minutes per day of walking can help boost your mood and reduce stress.\*\*

**3. Try a relaxing activity.** Schedule regular times for stress-relieving activities, such as meditation, yoga, tai chi or gentle exercise. You can even try a stress coping program.\*\*

**4. Set goals and priorities.** Decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload. Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.\*\*

**5. Stay connected with people who support you.** Ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations.\*\*

**6. Consider a clinical trial.** Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), and other research facilities across the country are studying the causes and effects of psychological stress and stress management techniques.\*\*

**7. Talk with your health care provider.** Get proper health care for existing or new health problems. If you have suicidal thoughts, feel you cannot cope, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope, you should seek help right away.\*\*

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

If you or a loved one is having thoughts of suicide, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800.273.TALK (8255)**. The service is available to anyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All calls are confidential.

\* National Institutes of Health. "Stress and your health."

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003211.htm> (last reviewed November 3, 2016/last updated March 9, 2017)

\*\* National Institute of Mental Health. "5 Things You Should Know About Stress."

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml> (accessed April 3, 2017)

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