

PATIENT INFORMATION

Too Much Stress

Too much stress is hard on your mind, body, and especially your heart. Experiencing too much stress is a risk factor for heart disease. High levels of stress, or prolonged stress, can lead to higher blood pressure, higher cholesterol, and increased risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

What is Stress?

Stress can lead to changes in your body...

- tremor in hands or legs
- tingling or numbness in fingertips
- racing heart
- sweating
- turning pale
- knots in stomach
- nausea
- headaches
- chest pain
- more rapid and shallow breathing
- heart palpitations
- increased muscle tension
 - neck
 - shoulders
 - jaw

Stress can lead to changes in your thinking...

- trouble thinking or focusing
- short attention span
- easily distracted
- poor memory
- focusing on the “worst case scenario”
- difficulty making simple decisions
- feeling confused

Stress can lead to changes in your emotions...

- feeling angry and irritable
- feeling anxious or fearful
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling "on edge"
- feeling resentful or cynical
- feeling down, or hopeless

Stress can lead to changes in your behavior...

- crying and/or angry outbursts
- pacing, fidgeting
- withdrawing from others
- increased smoking
- increased use of alcohol or drugs
- changes in sleep pattern
- change in appetite

Although stress itself cannot be avoided, you can take steps to reduce the amount of stress you feel every day. Learning how to deal more effectively with the stresses that do come your way will definitely make you a healthier, and likely, a happier person.

6 Steps to Begin to Reduce Your Stress

1. Always aim to maintain healthy habits

Exercise daily to get rid of tension. Eat healthy & balanced meals to nourish your body and mind. Avoid too much alcohol and drug use (This only encourages the wrong kind of coping). Limit caffeine intake to keep the jitters away. And finally, get plenty of sleep every night.

2. Be aware of when you experience negative stress

Negative stress comes from feelings of failure, being overworked and not having the tools to deal with simple stresses. Studies show that if these feelings are present for weeks and months at a time, they will harm your heart health. The first step is to know when you are stressed.

3. Teach yourself how to relax

You can't hide from negative stress. So when you find your blood pressure rising and your knuckles turning white, stop and recognize how you are reacting to the situation. Try to calm down by closing your eyes and breathing deeply. This helps lower your blood pressure, relaxes your body and allows you to clear your mind. By adjusting how you react physically to your stressors, you are allowing your body to better deal with the situation. We have CD's available that can guide you to relax, step-by-step.

Ask your nurse or psychologist. Recordings such as these are also available at many bookstores or through the Internet.

4. Seek out support from others

When life and health stressors become too much to handle, it is a good time to turn to friends and family for support. Look for a person that you can share your troubles with when you're stressed out.

5. Make small changes to organize your life

Unfinished "To Do" lists, incomplete projects, and unmet goals are a source of stress for many people. Identify these stressors and try to address them.

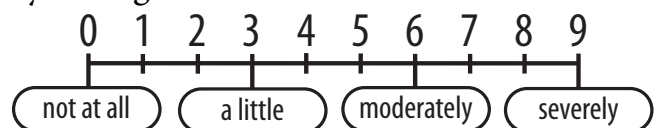
6. Cultivate your funny bone

They say, "Laughter is the best medicine." And guess what? It's true! Studies have shown that simply putting a smile on your face can lead to a healthier body. Just like getting angry can make your blood pressure spike, being happy sends serotonin levels soaring, making you feel great all over. Allow yourself to have some fun in your life, whether it's reading a good book, listening to music, or visiting an old friend.

Start putting these tips to practice today. You'll discover how much more enjoyable each day can be.

When Should I Seek Help?

Ask the following question. Over the last two weeks how much have I been bothered by feeling anxious or nervous?



If you score a 5 or more, it would be a good idea to talk to your health care provider or a mental health professional about how you feel.