Stress happens

Manage your stress and protect your health

What is stress?

Basically, stress is your body's reaction to danger. Any threat, from being chased by a dog to meeting a deadline at work, causes stress hormones to trigger a "fight or flight" response. This reaction helps you act quickly, so you can overcome the threat. Maybe you run a little faster or hunker down to get that project done. And when the threat passes, your body goes back to normal.

But with the pressures we all face every day — work, family and finances — stress may last for weeks, instead of just minutes or hours. Constant stress interrupts the normal operations of your body and if it's not taken care of it can have negative long-term effects.[1]

Learn more about managing your stress

Visit the website for The American Institute of Stress at **stress.org** for information and tools on identifying and managing stress in your life.

Getting relief

Long-term stress can have negative effects on your mental and physical health. Try these self-care tips to get relief:[2]

Sleep on it
Stress itself can make this difficult, but sleep gives your mind and body a chance to recharge.

Get moving
Physical activity refocuses your mind and releases chemicals in your body to improve your sense of well-being.

Reach out
It can be easy to isolate yourself when you feel stressed. But family and friends can be a great distraction and source of support.

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Sources
1 Mental Health Foundation website: *Stress* (accessed July 2019): mentalhealth.org.uk.
2 Mayo Clinic website: Stress relievers: *Tips to tame stress* (accessed July 2019): mayoclinic.org.
3 Cleveland Clinic website: *Stress* (accessed July 2019): clevelandclinic.org.
4 Mayo Clinic website: *Chronic stress puts your health at risk* (accessed July 2019): mayoclinic.org.

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More tips to try

- **Laugh it up**
  Laughter does good things for your body and can cool down your stress response.
- **Take up yoga**
  Yoga uses mental and physical focus to achieve peacefulness. It helps you relax and manage stress.
- **Speak up**
  Saying "no" when your to-do list is already a mile long can help you manage your stress. It also helps to make sure you put the needs of you and your family first.
- **Write it down**
  Putting your thoughts and feelings down on paper can be a great release for stress. Just sit down and let the words flow.
- **Play some music**
  Whether you play it or listen to it, music can help relieve stress by reducing muscle tension, decreasing stress hormones and providing distraction. If you don't feel musical – try another hobby that distracts your mind from your stress.
- **See a counselor or therapist**
  If these self-care techniques aren't helping manage your stress as much as you'd hoped, it's okay to seek out a professional counselor or therapist. They can help you find the sources of your stress and suggest coping tools.

What does stress look like?

The sooner you notice the physical signs of stress, the sooner you can work on relieving it.
Here are a few things to look for if you think you or someone close to you is experiencing stress:[3]

- Headaches
- Muscle tension in your neck, face or shoulders
- Tiredness and exhaustion
- Weight gain or loss
- Upset stomach or diarrhea

Healthy mind – healthy you

If you feel stressed, it's important to take it seriously. Stress that's not taken care of can lead to negative effects on your health, including:[4]

- Digestive problems
- Heart disease
- Weight gain
- Impaired memory
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble sleeping
- Depression