

# Stress Reduction



## What is stress?

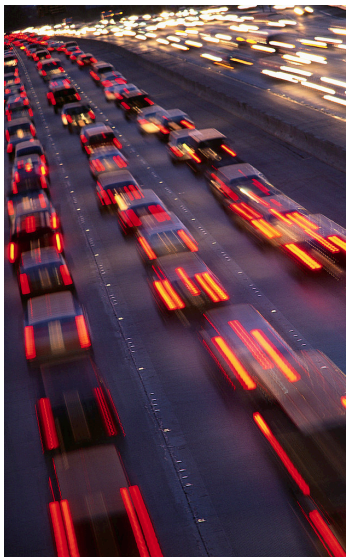
Stress is a normal emotional and physical reaction to the demands of life. Stress comes from both the good and bad things that happen to you. If you did not feel any stress, you would not be alive!

Stress can become a problem when you are not sure how to handle it. Worry sets in, and you feel “stressed”.



## What is the body's natural stress response?

When you sense danger—whether it's real or imagined—your body's defenses react in a rapid, automatic way. It's known as “fight-or-flight”, or the stress response.



The stress response is the body's way of protecting you. When it is working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life. For example, it can give you the strength to defend yourself, or make you slam on the brakes to avoid a car accident.

### Watch for stressors

Situations that cause stress are called 'stressors'. They can come from people and situations around you or how you deal with situations.

## Here are examples of some stressors to watch for:

### People and situations

- Major life changes
- Work
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial problems
- Being too busy
- Children and family



### How you deal with situations

- Inability to accept uncertainty
- Pessimism
- Negative self-talk
- Unrealistic expectations
- Perfectionism
- Lack of assertiveness

### Can stress hurt my health?

Long-term stress or 'chronic stress' can lead to serious health problems, including:

- Heart disease
- Digestive problems
- Sleep problems
- Pain
- Depression and anxiety
- Autoimmune diseases
- Memory impairment
- Skin conditions, such as eczema
- Infertility

## Signs of stress

Learn how to recognize when your stress levels are out of control. The most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar—even normal.



### Thinking

- Poor judgment
- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Seeing only the negative
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying

### Emotions

- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Depression or general unhappiness

### Body

- Aches and pains
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Nausea, dizziness
- Chest pain, rapid heart beat
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds

## Behaviour

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (such as nail biting, pacing)

If you're experiencing any of the warning signs of stress, see your doctor. Your doctor can help you find out whether or not your symptoms are stress-related or caused by other health problems.



## Learn how to manage stress in a healthy way



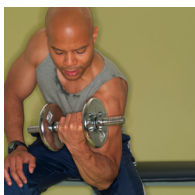
**Find the source of your stress.** Figure out what is really bothering you. It's the first step in managing your stress.



**Change your environment when possible.** For example, changing jobs if problems at work are the source of your stress.



**Build stronger and more satisfying relationships.** A strong support network of family, friends or even support groups is one of your greatest protections against stress.



**Be physically active.** It can be a great stress-buster and can boost your heart health, too. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting any activity program.



**Learn relaxation techniques.** Activities such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing help activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is opposite to the stress response.



**Make time for yourself.** In trying to meet everyone else's needs, don't forget to take care of yourself too.



**Use laughter.** It's your body's natural way to release stress.



**Eat well.** Don't skip meals because hunger can leave you vulnerable to stress.



**Be in nature.** Spending time outdoors or in nature can reduce stress and is important to your mental.

## How much stress is too much?

The answer is different for every person. Stress affects the mind, body and behavior in many ways, and everyone experiences stress differently.

Some people are easy going, while others have trouble handling obstacles. Some people even seem to thrive on the excitement and challenge of a high-stress lifestyle.



You can't completely eliminate stress from your life, but you can control how much it affects you. Managing stress depends on the supports you have and how ready you are to make the changes necessary for a healthy lifestyle. Talk to your health care provider about taking steps to control your stress.

## Helpful resources

Canadian Mental Health Association

Website: [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Phone: 416 789 7957

Centre for Addiction & Mental Health

Website: [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)

Phone: 416 595 6111 or toll free 1 800 463 6273

Heart & Stroke

Website: [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

Phone: 1 888 473 4636



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