



Stress

When our stress levels are too high, we can experience the following:

- Fatigue
- Moodiness
- Muscle tension or pain in the body
- Trouble sleeping
- Overeating or not eating enough
- Anger or irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Using alcohol or drugs to feel better
- Inability to relax
- Changes in relationships

People experience and cope with stress in different ways. We often talk about having high levels of stress but are challenged to find workable solutions. Common sources of stress include work, relationships, parenting, finances, caregiving, and more. It is important to know our limits when it comes to stress to avoid more serious problems.

What is stress?

Stress can be defined as the brain's response to any demand. Many things can trigger this response, including change. Changes can be positive or negative, as well as real or perceived. They may be recurring, short-term, or long-term and may include things like commuting to and from school or work everyday, traveling for a yearly vacation, or moving to another home. Changes can be mild and relatively harmless, such as winning a race, watching a scary movie, or riding a rollercoaster. Major changes, such as divorce, a serious illness, a car accident, and exposure to violence or poor living conditions can lead to traumatic stress reactions.

FACT:

According to a recent study by the APA on stress in america, nearly **70%** of Americans experience physical and mental symptoms of stress, but only **37%** think they are doing very well at managing stress.

Healing & Recovery



There are many ways to manage stress and find relief. Tips to reduce stress include:

- Exercise
- Getting enough sleep
- Talking with supportive friends or family
- Eating healthy
- Staying hydrated
- Engaging in fun activities
- Taking deep breaths
- Mindfulness and meditation
- Keeping things as simple as possible
- Managing other health conditions
- Practicing good self-care
- Asking for help and support

Stress and Health

Our bodies are well equipped to handle stress in small doses, but when there are multiple stressors or when stress becomes long-term, chronic, or severe, it can have serious effects on our physical and mental health.

Unhealthy levels of stress can lead to:

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| Headaches and migraines | Stomach and digestive problems |
| Sleeplessness | Weight gain |
| Depression | Lack of energy |
| Shortness of breath or rapid breathing | Anxiety disorders |
| Heartburn | High blood pressure |
| High blood sugar | Trouble concentrating and memory problems |
| Muscle pain | Reproductive problems |
| Lowered immune system | |
| Skin problems | |

We might choose to use alcohol or other drugs to “help” with stress. This strategy can backfire, causing more physical, mental, and social problems. Times of high stress make alcohol and drug use more risky and can increase problems with dependence or addiction.

Get connected to free, 24/7 support from a trained counselor at the Maryland Helpline. Call **(2-1-1, press 1)**, text your zip code to **898-211**, or visit **211MD.org**.

