

Mental Health Matters

April 2024



Need Mental Health Support?

OPTUM EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) OFFERS **FREE CONFIDENTIAL HELP**

Call toll-free

888-444-8624 any time

OR

Go to

www.liveandworkwell.com and browse as a guest using code **CSEBO**

April is National Stress Awareness Month

Stress is a physical and emotional reaction that people experience as they encounter challenges in life. When you're under stress, your body reacts by releasing hormones that produce the "fight-or-flight" response. Your heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure go up, your muscles tense, and you sweat more. Occasional stress is a normal coping mechanism. However, long-term stress (also called chronic stress) may contribute to or worsen a range of health problems including digestive disorders, headaches, sleep disorders, and other symptoms. Stress may worsen asthma and has been linked to depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.

There is no drug to cure stress. But we do have access to a built-in "stress reset button." It's called the relaxation response. In contrast to the stress response, the relaxation response slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and decreases oxygen consumption and levels of stress hormones.

Some people use psychological and physical approaches, such as **yoga**, **mindfulness**, or **relaxation techniques**, to release tension and to counteract the ill effects of stress.

The Bottom Line

Relaxation Techniques

Creating the relaxation response through the use of relaxation techniques can counteract the negative effects of stress. There is evidence that relaxation techniques can reduce blood pressure, inflammatory cytokines, and oxidative stress, as well as improve glycemic control in people with type 2 diabetes.

Relaxation techniques often combine breathing and focused attention on pleasing thoughts and images to calm the mind and the body. Some examples of relaxation techniques are autogenic training, biofeedback, deep breathing, guided imagery, progressive relaxation, and self-hypnosis.

Deep Breathing

Studies have shown that slow, deep breathing (also called diaphragmatic breathing) exercises may modestly lower blood pressure and reduce levels of cortisol (a main stress hormone in the body).

A 2019 review of 3 studies, with a total of 880 participants, found preliminary evidence suggesting that diaphragmatic breathing exercises may help to reduce stress. Promising positive changes were seen in mental health self-evaluations and in certain physical measures, such as cortisol levels and blood pressure.

Full article found at <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>





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In case of an Emergency:

- 911 For Immediate Support
- Ventura County Crisis Team (866) 998-2243 –(24 hours)

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS
#ENDTHESTIGMA

Is it stress or anxiety?

Life can be stressful—you may feel stressed about performance at school, traumatic events (such as a pandemic, a natural disaster, or an act of violence), or a life change. Everyone feels stress from time to time.

What is stress? Stress is the physical or mental response to an external cause, such as having a lot of homework or having an illness. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can happen repeatedly over a long time.

What is anxiety? Anxiety is your body's reaction to stress and can occur even if there is no current threat.

If that anxiety doesn't go away and begins to interfere with your life, it could affect your health. You could experience problems with sleeping, or with your immune, digestive, cardiovascular, and reproductive systems. You also may be at higher risk for developing a mental illness such as an anxiety disorder or depression. Read more about anxiety disorders.

It's important to manage your stress.

Everyone experiences stress, and sometimes that stress can feel overwhelming. You may be at risk for an anxiety disorder if it feels like you can't manage the stress and if the symptoms of your stress:

- Interfere with your everyday life.
- Cause you to avoid doing things.
- Seem to be always present.

Full article found at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/so-stressed-out-fact-sheet>

EXCITING NEWS!!

The California Department of Health Care Services launched the Behavioral Health Virtual Services Platform featuring two free apps: BrightLife Kids for children ages 0-12, and Soluna for youth and young adults ages 13-25, offering a range of digital tools, resources, and virtual services. These apps provide equitable and timely behavioral health support to all families in California, free of charge.

Learn more about how these apps can support the emotional health and well-being of your family at www.calhope.org.