How Can I Manage Stress?

It's important to learn how to recognize how stress affects you, learn how to deal with it, and develop healthy habits to ease your stress. What is stressful to one person may not be to another. Stress can come from happy events (a new marriage, job promotion, new home) as well as unhappy events (illness, overwork, family problems).



What is stress?

Stress is your body's response to change. Your body reacts to it by releasing adrenaline (a hormone) that can cause your breathing and heart rate to speed up, and your blood pressure to rise. These reactions help you deal with the situation.

The link between stress and heart disease is not clear. But, over time, unhealthy responses to stress may lead to health problems. For instance, people under stress may overeat, drink too much alcohol or smoke. These unhealthy behaviors can increase your risk of heart disease.

Not all stress is bad. Speaking to a group or watching a close football game can be stressful, but they can be fun, too. The key is to manage your stress properly.

How does stress make you feel?

Stress affects each of us in different ways. You may have physical signs, emotional signs or both.

- You may feel angry, afraid, excited or helpless.
- It may be hard to sleep.
- You may have aches and pains in your head, neck, jaw and back.
- It can lead to habits like smoking, drinking, overeating or drug abuse.
- You may not even feel it at all, even though your body suffers from it.

How can I cope with it?

Taking steps to manage stress will help you feel more in control of your life. Here are some good ways to cope.

- Try positive self-talk — turning negative thoughts into positive ones. For example, rather than thinking "I can't do this," say "I'll do the best I can."
- Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly, relax, breathe deeply and think of something peaceful.
- Engage in physical activity regularly. Do what you enjoy — walk, swim, ride a bike or do yoga. Letting go of the tension in your body will help you feel a lot better.
- Try to do at least one thing every day that you enjoy, even if you only do it for 15 minutes.

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How can I live a more relaxed life?

Here are some positive healthy habits you may want to develop to manage stress and live a more relaxed life.

- Think ahead about what may upset you. Have a plan ready to deal with situations. Some things you can avoid. For example, spend less time with people who bother you. Avoid driving in rush-hour traffic.
- Learn to say "no." Don't promise too much.
- Give up your bad habits. Too much alcohol, cigarettes or caffeine can increase stress. If you smoke, make the decision to quit now.
- Slow down. Try to "pace" not "race." Plan ahead and allow enough time to get the most important things done.
- Get enough sleep. Try to get 6 to 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Get organized. Use "To Do" lists if it helps you focus on your most important tasks. Approach big tasks one step at a time.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

1. Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
2. Sign up to get *Heart Insight,* a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork.**

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

How can family and friends help?

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.

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