

# WEEKLY WELLNESS NEWS

## Can't STRESS It Enough: Your Health Matters

Stress can have a wide-range of negative effects on your health. Learn what happens when you live with long-term stress.



When stress grips your body, you know it. Your heart starts pounding, your muscles tense, your stomach feels tied in knots. Sometimes this response can be a good thing. It may help you escape from an attacker or win your tennis game. However, continued stress can have negative effects on your physical health.

### THE EFFECTS OF STRESS

#### Digestion

Stress hormones slow the release of stomach acid and interfere with how well the stomach can empty itself. This can cause stomachaches. These factors raise your risk for heart attacks and strokes.

#### Heart, Brain & Blood Vessels

High levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, increase your heart rate and blood pressure. Cortisol can also raise your cholesterol levels. These factors raise your risk for heart attacks and strokes.

#### Immune System

Normally, your immune system responds to infections by releasing chemicals that aid in the healing process. The stress response weakens your immune system, slowing wound healing and making you more likely to get colds and infections.

#### Weight

Cortisol makes you crave fats and carbohydrates, which can result in weight gain if consumed excessively. Cortisol also makes you more likely to put on weight in your abdominal area. Weight gain in this area raises your risk for heart disease and diabetes.

#### Mental Health

Being bombarded with stress hormones creates a constant state of tension and anxiety. Over time this can lead to depression, headaches or other problems, especially if they run in the family. Also, because your body is in a heightened state of arousal, you may have trouble sleeping.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS



HYSTERICIS

INSOMNIA

HEADACHE

DEPRESSION

ANGER

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## 6 WAYS TO EASE STRESS

Feeling stressed out? Most Americans do. Learn ways to calm the stress in your life.

The trick is to keep your stress within healthy limits. If your stress meter is high, learn to relax. Here are some soothing ways to handle your stressors.

### 1. Breathe

I'm sure you've heard the expression, "take a breather". Sometimes only 5 minutes of deep breathing is enough to ban stress.

Many people take shallow breaths that only fill a part of the lungs. Deep breathing gets more oxygen into the lungs and can help calm the brain.

### 2. Relax Your Muscles

Progressive muscle relaxation is another great way to ease stress. Practicing it can help you become aware of when you are holding stress in your body. Is your back tense? Try to relax it and you will start to feel your mind relax, too.

### 3. Say Yes to Yoga

Yoga is a system of exercises for gaining bodily or mental control and well-being. The philosophy is that the breath, the mind, and the body are so closely linked that whatever you do to one will effect the other. In addition to easing stress, yoga can improve strength, balance and flexibility. Yoga is a gentle form of exercise, safe for most people when practiced correctly.



### 4. Try Tai Chi

Tai chi is a series of postures that flow into one another through connecting transition moves. These slow, graceful and precise body movements are said to improve body awareness and enhance strength and coordination. Tai chi is a low-impact aerobic activity with a low risk of injury.

Take a tai chi class, buy a book, or watch instructional videos. Once you learn how to do tai chi, you can practice almost anywhere.

### 5. Meditate

Meditation is spiritual practice and stress reliever that has been around for centuries. You learn how to relax by putting your focus into a word, a sound, or your breathing. It helps to take your mind away from any distractions and instantly eases your stress.

### 6. Get a Massage

In massage therapy, hands are used to manipulate soft muscle tissue. A good massage is not only relaxing, but it may also have some real healing benefits. Some studies have shown that the kneading and pressing of muscles slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, improves blood circulation, relaxes muscles, and helps reduce stress levels.

If a massage doesn't fit into your budget, look into one of the other stress relievers! There is something for everyone.

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# WEEKLY WELLNESS NEWS



Long-term job stress can grind you down. Learn more about stress and how to tame it in the workplace.

## STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Your job used to be challenging, but manageable. Now it seems no matter how hard you try, you can never keep up. Your inbox is piling up and your boss is on your back. This scenario is all too common, according to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In national surveys:

- 40% of workers say their job is very or extremely stressful.
- 75% say workers suffer from more job-related stress than workers in the previous generations.
- 25% of employees say their job is their number one stressor.

Even if you love your job, long-term stress can grind you down. Read on to learn more about stress and how to tame it in the workplace.

### From Cave to Cubicle: The Stress Response

Stress is a necessary survival response that draws upon instinct, hormones and muscle. Our ancestors' 'fight or flight' response to stress allowed the human race to survive in a hostile environment. Stress in small doses can be beneficial for meeting deadlines or acing a presentation. However, if stress starts seeping into every aspect of your life, it can lead to poor health.

### Tame Your Stress

The old stigma that associated stress with weakness is long gone, and employers are much more knowledgeable of the fact that stress can cause non-productivity, injuries and more absences due to illness.

### If Work Stress is Getting You Down...

- **Talk to your manager.** Ask about ways to make your job more manageable. Be positive: offer solutions, not just complaints.
- **Explore work resources at your company.** Find out if there is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or stress management class that you could access.
- **Take good care of yourself.** Be sure to eat well, get enough sleep and make time for exercise.
- **Get help if you need it.** You may want to take a meditation, yoga or tai chi class. You might also consider seeing a therapist who could help you seek solutions to your work situation.



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## LESS MESS LESS STRESS

The key to getting stress under control is effective time management. By following these tips, you'll get more done, feel better about yourself and decrease your stress levels.

### Make a Plan

Using a to-do list is the most powerful way to get control of your life. Spend a little time at the start of each week making a list of what you need to accomplish. For better organization, some people may use a day planner, electronic device or spreadsheet, but you can use a simple notebook.

### Prioritize

Once you have made a to-do list, rank each item by importance. Place items of higher importance at the top of the list, and medium or lower importance at the bottom.

### Be Realistic

Allow a reasonable amount of time for each task. Don't over-schedule your days because you will always need time for a break or unexpected tasks.

### Make Time For Yourself

Your health and well-being is important, so make sure you allow time for good meals, exercise, relaxation and family & friends.

### Review Your To-Do List Daily

Check off items as you complete them; this can give you a sense of accomplishment. You should start the day by picking out reasonable tasks to complete. Don't let running out of time stress you out though - what you don't finish one day can be moved to the next day.

### Avoid Procrastination

Putting off tasks that you know need to be completed just creates more stress. If you feel overwhelmed by a task, break it down into smaller parts and reward yourself when you finish each part.

### Get Organized

Spend some extra time setting up your work space so you know where everything is. Choose a spot to put your keys, briefcase, purse or other items that you bring in every day. Put things back where they belong to avoid clutter and frustration.

### Learn to Say NO

Accepting more responsibilities than you can handle is guaranteed to increase your stress. If your plate is already full, don't try to put more on it.

In addition to following these tips for stress management, try strategies such as yoga, meditation or exercise. A combination will give you the best results for a stress-free life.

For more information on stress and how it affects your health, visit [www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress.aspx)



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