

Know when you've reached your stress limit



Surveys show more than one in four U.S. workers feel very stressed or burned out at work.

How do you manage the stress in your life? Most people would say they want to eliminate it altogether – that they would do very well without any stress. But, stress is a natural part of life, and necessary in many ways.

What is stress?

- Stress is the normal reaction of your body and mind to changes around you. These changes may be physical, emotional or environmental.
- Your body creates extra energy to deal with stress. An increase in heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, metabolism and blood flow to muscles is meant to help your body act quickly and perform in a stressful situation. This extra energy must be used and channeled to be effective and not harmful.

Too much or too little stress?

Too much tension or pressure and excessive worrying can cause chronic stress. This is probably the most common type of stress that people complain about. Less common, but also unhealthy, is a lack of stress in one's life. Some stress is needed to motivate and perform daily tasks. Too little stress results in an absence of physical and mental stimulation. This can lead to boredom and depression.

Simplify

Stress is a part of normal life. You can't control all that happens in your life, but you can change how you react or handle what happens.

References:

- National Mental Health Association MHIC Fact sheet: Stress – Coping With Everyday Problems nmha.org
- The National Ag Safety Database: Stress Management for the Health of It cdc.gov/nasd/

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Know the red flags

To determine if your stress is healthy, listen to your body. The following are signs that may be related to unhealthy stress in your life:

- ✓ Headaches
- ✓ Insomnia
- ✓ Upset stomach, nausea, indigestion or diarrhea
- ✓ Over-eating, or not eating enough
- ✓ Unhealthy habits such as smoking, excessive drinking, or drug use
- ✓ Irritability, anger
- ✓ Anxiety

What triggers stress in your life?

What is stressful for one person may not be for another. Each person has his or her own individual stress triggers and reactions. The first step is to recognize stress in your life and monitor the effect it has on you. This will help you determine your personal tolerance level. With this information you can better manage the amount of stress in your home, work, and social surroundings.

Tips for coping with stress

Stress is a part of normal life. You can't control all that happens in your life, but you can change how you react or handle what happens. Here are good ways to cope:

Be realistic

- Try to learn to accept the things you can't change.
- Avoid taking on more responsibility than you can or should handle – learn to say NO.
- Learn not to be too critical of yourself, and avoid comparing yourself with others.
- No one is perfect – do not place unreasonable demands on yourself.
- Look for the positive aspects of situations, instead of the negative.

Prioritize

- Take one thing at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- Make a list of “must dos” and check off items one by one.
- Plan out your available time and use caution not to over-schedule yourself.
- Prepare as much ahead of time as possible.
- Avoid procrastination.

Communicate

- Talk about your feelings and stress with someone close.
- Be open with family, friends and co-workers – let them know if you need help or more time to cope with your stress.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle

- Eat a well-balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables and water.
- Limit fast food, sweets and caffeine.
- Get enough rest.
- Get daily exercise – take a walk with your spouse, a friend or the dog.
- Have regular check-ups. Increased stress can make any health condition worse.

Don't add more stress

- Beware of unhealthy choices as a solution to deal with stress.
- Smoking, excessive drinking or taking drugs is not the answer and can make your situation worse.

Make time for relaxation

- Put quiet time into each day just for you (20-30 minutes a day).
- Take a walk at a park and enjoy the scenery, sun, fresh air and nature.
- Listen to music that you enjoy.
- Enjoy a relaxing bath or shower.
- Make time for what you enjoy – a craft, a club, sports or games.
- Consider taking a class on yoga, relaxation techniques or meditation.

Success will not happen overnight, but with continued effort you can keep your stress under control. Listen to what your body is telling you each day. Use these tips to find what works best for you. Enjoy life!

To learn more about stress and healthy ways to manage it, visit us at umr.com.

Still feeling stressed?

If things do not improve, or if you feel your stress is out of control, you may want to seek professional help. Some sources of available help include physicians, counselors, ministers or employee assistance professionals (EAP). If you are concerned about the physical health effects of chronic or high stress in your life, it is best to see your health care provider.