

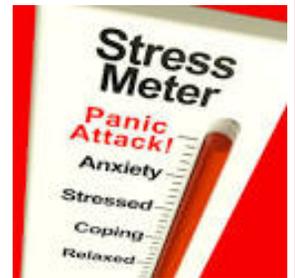
Stress Management

What Is Stress?

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way. When you sense danger—whether it's real or imagined—the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction, or the stress response. The stress response is the body's way of protecting you. When working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life. The stress response also helps you rise to meet challenges. But beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships, and your quality of life.

Signs and Symptoms of Too Much Stress

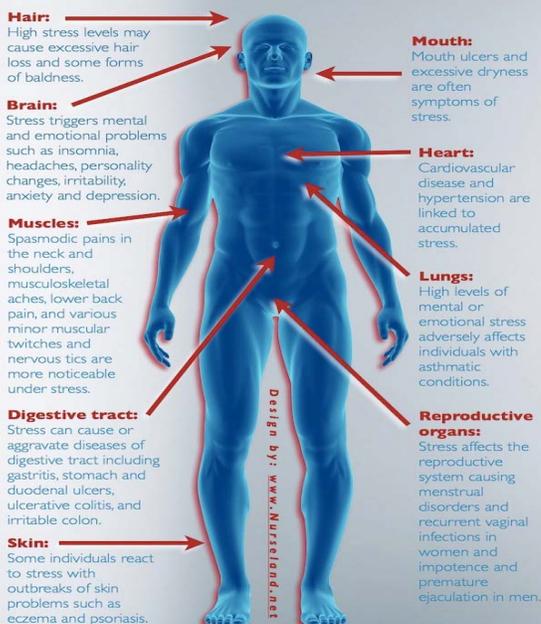
It's important to learn how to recognize when your stress levels are out of control. The signs and symptoms of stress overload can be almost anything. Stress affects the mind, body, and behavior in many ways, and everyone experiences stress differently. The following are some common signs of stress overload :



- Poor judgment
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying
- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Inability to concentrate
- Depression or general unhappiness
- Aches and pains
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax

The Effects of Stress

Physical or mental stresses may cause physical illness as well as mental or emotional problems. Here are parts of the body most affected by stress.



Effects of Stress

The body doesn't distinguish between physical and psychological threats. When you're stressed over a busy schedule, an argument with a friend, a traffic jam, or a mountain of bills, your body reacts just as strongly as if you were facing a life-or-death situation. If you have a lot of responsibilities and worries, your emergency stress response may be “on” most of the time. The more your body's stress system is activated, the harder it is to shut off. Long-term exposure to stress can lead to serious health problems. Chronic stress disrupts nearly every system in your body. It can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, contribute to infertility, and speed up the aging process. Long-term stress can even rewire the brain, leaving you more vulnerable to anxiety and depression.



How Do I Manage Stress?

There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no “one size fits all” solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control. Avoid stress by: learning how to say “no”, staying away from people who stress you, taking control of your environment, avoiding stressful topics, and lessening your to-do list. Alter the stressful situation by: expressing your feelings, being willing to change, being assertive, and managing time better. Adapt to stress by: looking at problems positively, looking at the big picture, setting reasonable standards, and always focusing in the positive. Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you’ll be in a better place to handle life’s stressors when they inevitably come. You can also increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health. Some ways to help strengthen your physical health include: exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, decreasing your caffeine and sugar, avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and by getting enough sleep.

