

HealthyBy Choice

...One Day at a Time

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American Heart Month

Let's talk about stress and your heart. Not all stress is bad. But chronic (ongoing) stress can lead to health problems.

Preventing and managing chronic stress can help lower your risk for serious conditions like heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and depression.

Being prepared and feeling in control of your situation will help lower your stress. Follow these 9 tips for preventing and managing stress.

1. **Plan your time.** Think ahead about how you are going to use your time. Write a to-do list and figure out what's most important – then do that thing first. Be realistic about how long each task will take.
2. **Prepare yourself.** Prepare ahead of time for stressful events like a job interview or a hard conversation with a loved one.
 - Picture the event in your mind.
 - Stay positive.
 - Imagine what the room will look like and what you will say.
 - Have a back-up plan.
3. **Relax with deep breathing or meditation.** Deep breathing and meditation are 2 ways to relax your muscles and clear your mind.
4. **Relax your muscles.** Stress causes tension in your muscles. Try stretching or taking a hot shower to help you relax.
5. **Get active.** Regular physical activity can help prevent and manage stress. It can also help relax your muscles and improve your mood.
 - Aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes a week of physical activity. Try going for a bike ride or taking a walk.
 - Be sure to exercise for at least 10 minutes at a time.
 - Do strengthening activities – like crunches or lifting weights – at least 2 days a week.
6. **Eat healthy.** Give your body plenty of energy by eating healthy foods – including vegetables, fruits, and lean sources of protein.
7. **Drink alcohol only in moderation.** Avoid using alcohol and drugs to manage your stress. If you choose to drink, **drink only in moderation.** This means no more than 1 drink a day for women and no more than 2 drinks a day for men.
8. **Talk to friends and family.** Tell your friends and family if you are feeling stressed. They may be able to help.
9. **Get help if you need it.** Stress is a normal part of life. But if your stress doesn't go away or keeps getting worse, you may need help. Over time, stress can lead to serious problems like depression, anxiety, or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

What are the signs of stress?

When people are under stress, they may feel:

- Worried
- Angry
- Irritable
- Depressed
- Unable to focus

Stress also affects the body. Physical signs of stress include:

- Headaches
- Back pain
- Problems sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Weight gain or loss
- Tense muscles
- Frequent or more serious colds

What are the benefits of managing stress?

Over time, chronic stress can lead to health problems. Managing stress can help you:

- Sleep better
- Control your weight
- Get sick less often and feel better faster when you are sick
- Have less neck and back pain
- Be in a better mood
- Get along better with family and friends



Control Your Stress...Control Your Health.



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...One Day at a Time



February is American Heart Month

During the month of February, Americans see the human heart as the symbol of love. February is American Heart Month, a time to show yourself the love. Learn about your risks for heart disease and stroke, and stay “heart healthy” for yourself and your loved ones.

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Choosing healthful meal and snack options can help you avoid heart disease and its complications. Be sure to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables—adults should have at least 5 servings each day. Eating foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol and high in fiber can help prevent high cholesterol. Limiting salt or sodium in your diet also can lower your blood pressure.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese can increase your risk for heart disease. To determine whether your weight is in a healthy range, doctors often calculate a number called the body mass index (BMI). Doctors sometimes also use waist and hip measurements to measure a person's body fat.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity can help you maintain a healthy weight and lower cholesterol and blood pressure. The Surgeon General recommends that adults should engage in moderate-intensity exercise for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- **Monitor your blood pressure.** High blood pressure often has no symptoms, so be sure to have it checked on a regular basis. You can check your blood pressure at home, at a pharmacy, or at a doctor's office..
- **Don't smoke.** Cigarette smoking greatly increases your risk for heart disease. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, quit as soon as possible. Your doctor can suggest ways to help you quit.
- **Limit alcohol use.** Avoid drinking too much alcohol, which can increase your blood pressure. Men should stick to no more than two drinks per day, and women to no more than one.
- **Have your cholesterol checked.** Your health care provider should test your cholesterol levels at least once every 5 years. Talk with your doctor about this simple blood test.
- **Manage your diabetes.** If you have diabetes, monitor your blood sugar levels closely, and talk with your doctor about treatment options.
- **Take your medicine.** If you're taking medication to treat high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes, follow your doctor's instructions carefully. Always ask questions if you don't understand something.



Do your part for a healthy heart!



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