An Overview of Stress

Common effects of stress: On your body, On your mood and On your behavior

- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Change in sex drive
- Stomach upset
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or depression
- Overeating or under eating
- Angry outbursts
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Tobacco use
- Social withdrawal

Act to manage stress

If you have stress symptoms, taking steps to manage your stress can have numerous health benefits. Explore stress management strategies, such as:

- Physical activity
- Relaxation techniques
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Tai chi

And be sure to get plenty of sleep, eat a balanced diet, and avoid tobacco use and excess caffeine and alcohol intake.

When to seek help

If you're not sure if stress is the cause or if you've taken steps to control your stress but your symptoms continue, see your doctor. Your doctor may want to check for other potential causes. Also, if you have chest pain, especially if it occurs during physical activity or is accompanied by shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness, nausea, or pain radiating into your shoulder and arm, get emergency help immediately. These may be warning signs of a heart attack and not simply stress symptoms.
An Overview of Mindfulness

Calmer Minds, Better Health with Mindfulness

Mindfulness — sometimes called a form of meditation or therapy — can enrich lives, calm minds and even improve health. The October issue of Mayo Clinic Health Letter describes mindfulness in-depth in an eight-page Special Report. Mayo Clinic Health Letter Online. www.mayoclinic.org

Rooted in ancient traditions, mindfulness has many descriptions. In general, it's a conscious effort to be completely present, setting aside worries, expectations and other thoughts to be fully aware of the current moment.

The report covers suggestions to improve mindfulness as well as its many benefits. Highlights include:

Getting started: While many classes are available mindfulness doesn't require formal training. A key aspect is paying attention to current surroundings, focusing on one sense at a time. This present-moment focus helps eliminate dwelling on the past, worries about the future, or random, chaotic thoughts. Mindfulness can be practiced at a dedicated time each day or throughout the day — during dinner with a spouse, playing with a grandchild or even doing dishes. Accepting and appreciating each moment for what it is can increase calmness and bring more peace and joy.

Breathing: A reliable way to focus on the present moment is to focus on the breath. By observing the breath, without forcing or regulating, one can forget everything else for the moment. By just thinking about one thing, the breath, powers of concentration increase. This can bring deep calm and awareness.

Pain management: Several studies have shown that mindfulness training improves chronic pain. In one study, half of the participants experienced a reduction in pain by 50 percent or more with mindfulness practice. Researchers speculate that patients were able to separate their physical feeling of pain from their perception of it. By detaching themselves from the pain and simply observing but not reacting to it, they were able to reduce the level of pain they experienced.

Coping with cancer: People with cancer experience a high degree of emotional stress as well as decreased physical health and well-being. Mindfulness is one complement to conventional cancer treatment that addresses these problems and helps people feel better.

Quality of life: Evidence indicates that mindfulness has a positive effect on quality of life, both in people living with chronic conditions and healthy people who wish to reduce stress and live more simply.
Practicing the Art of Mindfulness

Basic meditation, the practice of doing nothing and being tuned into your own mind at the same time, can be frustrating at first. But research shows it reduces stress and increases focus.

Step 1. Create good **posture**: Sit crossed-legged on a cushion on the floor or in a chair. Keep your back straight and let your shoulders drop. Take a deep breath and close your eyes if you wish.

Step 2. Notice your **breath**. Don’t change your breathing, but focus on the sensation of the air moving in and out of your lungs.

Step 3. As **thoughts** come into your mind and distract you from your breathing, acknowledge those thoughts and then return to focusing on your breathing each time.

Step 4. Don’t **judge** yourself or try to ignore distractions. Your job is simply to notice that your mind has wandered and to bring your attention back to your breathing.

Step 5. Start by **doing** this 10 minutes a day for a week. The more you meditate regularly, the easier it will be to keep your attention where you want it.

**Mindful Tips:**

**Wear A Watch**: You’ll avoiding picking up your phone and to check the time and won’t needlessly distracted

**No Phones in Bed**: Fully wake before you look at any devices

**Get Into Nature**: Take a hike and observe your surroundings. Resist the urge to Instagram them

Adapted from Full Catastrophe Living, 2nd edition by Jon Kabat-Zinn