

Your Wellness Matters

Stress



Many Americans experience stress on a daily basis. Unfortunately, chronic and long-term stress can greatly increase your risk of developing a serious health condition.

What is stress?

Stress is your body's natural response to any type of demand. It is a feeling of emotional or physical tension in response to an event or thought that causes you to be angry, nervous or frustrated. For example, you may feel stressed out about meeting a deadline or when traveling. Short-term instances of stress are not typically harmful to your long-term health.

Prolonged stress that is not addressed can become a serious health concern and can lead to burnout. Examples of chronic and long-term stress include financial troubles and heavy workloads. Stress that is left unchecked can contribute to health problems like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

What are the symptoms of stress?

Stress affects your mental health, but it can show itself in other ways too. Back pain, poor focus and headaches can all be symptoms of stress. Here are some other signals that you may be feeling stressed:

- Trouble sleeping or fatigue
- Feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, restlessness or anger
- Upset stomach
- Change in appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Chest pain

How can you address stress?

While it may not be possible to eliminate all of the stressors in your life, there are plenty of ways to reduce its effects on your life. Recognizing the signs of stress is

the first step to improving your health. Consider these tactics to keep stress at bay:

- Plan and prioritize your most important responsibilities.
- Limit interruptions so you don't have to refocus each time you're distracted. Some ways to limit distractions include using a Do Not Disturb function on your phone or blocking off time on your calendar to finish a project.
- Take breaks away from your workstation to mentally regroup. Consider going for a short walk to reenergize your mind.
- Listen to relaxing music to help you calm down.
- Take time off from work to clear your mind.
- Avoid caffeine, as this stimulant has been proven to exacerbate feelings of stress.
- Get some exercise to work off your stress. Exercise releases endorphins that can help you relax.
- Try meditating. Meditation is an activity that can calm your mind and keep you focused on the present.
- Learn to say no. Often, we overschedule ourselves, which can lead to feelings of stress. Don't be afraid to say no to taking on a project or going to an event if you need a break or time for yourself.

Where can I learn more?

If you still have trouble coping with stress, talk with your doctor about treatment options. Don't wait too long before seeking help, or you'll risk letting the stress pile up.