

What is stress?

Stress is how the brain and body respond to any demand. Every type of demand or stressor such as: exercise, work, school, major life changes, or traumatic events can be stressful. It is important to pay attention to how you deal with minor and major stress events so that you know when to seek help.

Stress can motivate people to prepare or perform. For example, when people need to take a test or interview for a new job. Stress can even be life-saving in some situations. In response to danger, your body prepares to face a threat or flee to safety. In these situations, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, and your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity.

How stress can affect you

People experience stress in different ways, and it can affect people's health differently. Since stress has negative effects, it will usually show itself one way or another. If you are experiencing stress often or for a long period of time, it could cause any of the following health problems.

- **Cognitive:** Memory problems, poor judgment, indecision, self-doubt, and inability to concentrate.
- **Emotional:** Depression, moodiness, irritability, panic, anxiety, cynicism, feeling overwhelmed, and frustration.
- **Physical:** Chest pain, rapid heartbeat, aches and pains, frequent colds, skin complaints, indigestion, and high blood pressure.
- **Behavioral:** Loss of sense of humor, demotivated, sleeping too little or too much, isolating yourself from others, and increase of alcohol, cigarettes, and/or caffeine.

Mobile apps

- [Breathe2Relax](#)
- [Happify: for Stress and Worry](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Pacifica](#)

Tips from our docs

This month, our healthy tip is brought to you by **Jan Kovach, MD**, our Medical Director.

Reducing your stress levels can not only make you feel better right now; it also may protect your health long term. Here are some ideas to reduce stress:

- **Identify what's causing stress.** Keep track of your state of mind throughout the day. Once you know what's bothering you, develop a plan for addressing it. That might mean setting more reasonable expectations for yourself and others or asking for help with household responsibilities, job assignments, or other tasks.
- **Build strong relationships.** Relationships can be a source of stress. But relationships can also serve as stress buffers. Reach out to family members or close friends and let them know you're having a tough time.
- **Exercise regularly.** Walking or other physical activities can also help you work off stress. Plus, exercise increases the production of endorphins, your body's natural mood-booster. Commit to a daily walk or other form of exercise.
- **Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider.** You should seek help right away if you have suicidal thoughts, are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope. Your doctor may be able to provide a recommendation.

Visit our [Behavioral Health page](#) to find additional information, screeners, and resources on behavioral health.

Additional resources

- [A.D.A.M. – NMHC's comprehensive Staying Healthy resource](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [Stress Management Society](#)