

Stress

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/11874-stress>

Stress is the natural reaction your body has when changes or challenges occur. It can result in many different physical, emotional and behavioral responses. Everyone experiences stress from time to time. You can't avoid it. But stress management techniques can help you deal with it.

Overview

What is stress?

Stress is a natural human reaction that happens to everyone. In fact, your body is designed to experience stress and react to it. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces physical and mental responses. That's stress.

Stress responses help your body adjust to new situations. Stress can be positive — keeping you alert, motivated and ready to avoid danger. For example, if you have an important test coming up, a stress response might help your body work harder and stay awake longer. But stress becomes a problem when stressors continue without relief or periods of relaxation.

Types of Stress

- **Acute stress:** Short-term, comes and goes quickly, and can be either positive or negative.
 - **Episodic acute stress:** Frequent episodes of acute stress without time to relax; common in high-pressure jobs.
 - **Chronic stress:** Long-term stress lasting weeks or months due to ongoing issues like financial problems or relationship troubles.
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Symptoms and Causes

How does stress affect the body?

Your autonomic nervous system triggers a “fight-or-flight” response. Prolonged activation causes wear and tear on your body.

Physical symptoms:

- Aches and pains
- Chest pain or racing heart
- Exhaustion or sleep issues
- Headaches, dizziness, shaking
- High blood pressure
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching
- Stomach issues
- Sexual dysfunction
- Weakened immunity

Psychological symptoms:

- Anxiety or irritability
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Sadness

Behavioral symptoms:

- Alcohol or substance use
- Overeating or eating disorders
- Compulsive behaviors (e.g., shopping or internet use)
- Smoking

Stress rash:

Stress can trigger hives — red, itchy welts on the skin. Antihistamines and stress management may help.

What causes stress?

Stress can come from both positive and negative events such as:

- Illness or death
- Marriage or divorce
- Financial trouble
- Moving or vacation
- Having a baby
- Retirement
- Job changes

Everyday causes of acute stress:

- Tests or presentations
 - Arguments
 - Multitasking and time pressure
 - Minor setbacks adding up
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Complications of Stress

Chronic stress may lead to:

- Immune disorders (arthritis, psoriasis)
- Digestive issues (ulcers, IBS)
- Cardiovascular issues (hypertension, palpitations)
- Reproductive issues (infertility, infections)
- Mental health conditions (depression, anxiety)

Seek immediate help if you have suicidal thoughts: **Call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline).**

How Is Stress Diagnosed?

Stress is subjective and diagnosed based on your experience. Healthcare providers may use questionnaires or evaluate related symptoms such as high blood pressure.

Management and Treatment

How can I relieve stress?

- Be physically active — even short walks help
 - Reflect daily on your accomplishments
 - Set short- and long-term goals
 - Talk to a therapist or doctor
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Outlook / Prognosis

How long does stress last?

Stress duration depends on life circumstances. Using effective management strategies regularly helps reduce or prevent symptoms.

Prevention

How can I reduce stress?

- Practice relaxation: meditation, yoga, breathing, tai chi
 - Eat well and sleep enough
 - Stay positive and express gratitude
 - Accept what you can't control
 - Say "no" when necessary
 - Stay socially connected and seek support
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Living With Stress

When should I talk to a healthcare provider?

- If you feel overwhelmed
- If your health is affected
- If techniques aren't working
- If you're using substances to cope

When should I seek emergency help?

- If you're thinking about hurting yourself
Call/text 988 — Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (24/7 support)
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Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

- What stress symptoms should I be worried about?
 - How can I manage stress better?
 - What techniques should I try?
 - Can you recommend a therapist or support group?
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It's normal to feel stress occasionally — it's part of life. But chronic stress can lead to serious health issues. If your stress isn't improving with techniques or you're feeling overwhelmed, talk to your provider. You deserve care and support — both mentally and physically.