How Stress Impacts Your Quality of Life

Nobody likes feeling stressed, yet the emotion is impossible to avoid. Whether you are in immediate physical danger, experiencing conflict in your relationships, or struggling to keep up with your current workload, everybody experiences stress at one point or another. It is simply a part of our nature.

As humans, we evolved to feel stressed when we need to be more alert in order to ensure our survival and safety. Stress tenses the muscles, increases our awareness and focus on the stressor, and activates our "fight or flight" response. The effects stress has on the body were formed in order to allow a person to react quicker and more effectively in life-threatening situations.

This effect can be incredibly useful when we find ourselves in danger. However, when the emotion seems to become the norm for a person, it can begin to negatively impact their quality of life.

# **What is Stress?**

Stress is the body's response to threats, pressure, or any situation our brain may perceive as potentially harmful to our safety or well-being. Stress can feel and look different for different people but will typically involve symptoms such as:

* Hyperventilating
* Muscle tension
* Panic attacks
* An inability to focus on anything other than the stressor
* Trouble sleeping
* Disorientation or disbelief
* Changes in eating habits
* Feelings of fear, anxiety, panic, anger, sadness, or worry
* Skin reactions such as a rash
* Increase in substance use
* Fatigue
* Chest pains
* Increased heart rate
* Heightened blood pressure
* Sweating
* Stomach issues or indigestion

We experience these symptoms because stress causes the body to produce hormones, like cortisol and adrenaline, that are intended to trigger our "fight or flight" response. This can be helpful in situations where we need to overcome fear or experience quicker reflexes. In most individuals, these hormones will fade as the threat fades.

However, some people will experience a constant feeling of pressure over an extended period of time. This is referred to as chronic stress. When this occurs, the body and mind will begin to feel its effects.

# **The Impacts of Stress on Mental Health**

[Chronic stress](https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/health#:~:text=This%20can%20put%20you%20at,and%20memory%20and%20concentration%20impairment.) will leave a person feeling anxious and on edge for an extended period of time. This feeling can begin to impact a person's cognitive, emotional, and psychological well-being. Chronic stress can begin to have a negative impact on a person's emotional regulation. Constantly feeling on edge may leave a person feeling irritable and cause them to act out in a more aggressive manner than they normally would. It can also leave a person feeling overwhelmed, sad, or anxious.

Stress can also begin to have an impact on a person's ability to sleep, relax, or give their brain a break. Because of this, one may experience insomnia, brain fog, fatigue, and reduced concentration and memory abilities.

The longer a person is exposed to stress, the more at risk they will be for serious mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and burnout.

# **How Stress Impacts the Body**

Many physical ailments have been associated with overexposure to stress. Those who experience chronic stress may find themselves at risk of developing health issues like:

* Digestive issues
* Muscle tension
* Aches and pains
* Heart disease
* Stroke
* High blood pressure
* Sleep issues
* Weight gain or weight loss
* Heart attack

# **Coping with Stress in a Healthier Way**

We all have our own ways of coping with stress. Some ways work great, while others can be detrimental to our health. Developing healthy coping mechanisms for stress is critical to living the highest quality of life possible. A few ways you can cope with stress in a healthy way include:

## **Take a Break from Consuming the News**

It is important to stay informed about what is going on in the world around you. There is no doubt about that. Doing so allows you to develop your own opinions on current events and gives you the chance to prepare for world events that impact you directly.

However, when we are constantly bombarded with the world's many problems, it can be easy to find yourself in a constant state of stress. When you begin to feel this way, taking a break from the news is entirely acceptable and necessary. When you find yourself feeling stressed, stop doom scrolling, turn off your TV, and turn your attention to the present moment.

Avoid falling into this sense of overwhelm in the first place by setting boundaries around your consumption of the news. Set some time aside to learn more about what is going on in the world, then step away from the stories for the rest of your day.

## **Care for Your Health**

In order to ensure your mental resilience is in its best shape, you must first ensure your physical health is in its best possible shape. This is because our mental and physical health depends on each other for strength, health, and resilience. Make sure you are:

* Eating healthy
* Eating enough
* Drinking enough water
* Getting some physical movement and exercise into your day
* Getting enough sleep
* Taking some time to be outside
* Taking breaks as needed

## **Avoid Illegal Drugs, Caffeine, and Alcohol**

Some people find themselves turning to harmful substances to help them cope with stress or find the energy to complete the tasks causing them stress. However, substances like illegal drugs, alcohol, and even caffeine can exacerbate the symptoms of stress or have a negative impact on your health rather than help solve them.

## **Lean on Somebody You Trust**

We all need a friend to lean on from time to time. Turn to a loved one you trust, like your mom, best friend, or favorite cousin. Open up about the things that are stressing you out and how they are making you feel. Oftentimes, simply sharing the things that are leaving us feeling stressed can feel like a huge weight being lifted from your shoulders.

## **Connect with Your Community**

Spending time surrounded by individuals you share interests with, like those who practice the same religion as you, live in your area, or enjoy similar hobbies, can play a massive role in taking your mind off stressful life situations.

## **Take a Break**

Take some time to step away from the media, your workload, and emails to give your brain a break. This will allow your brain a chance to recover, reevaluate the situation, and face stress with more resilience and calm. When taking a break, turn to some more relaxing hobbies, like:

* Walking or some other form of exercise you enjoy
* Reading or Writing
* Knitting or crocheting
* Painting or drawing

## **Practice Some Relaxation Techniques**

For moments when the stress begins to feel overwhelming, having some relaxation techniques in your toolbox will prove to be critical in helping you find a sense of calm. A few relaxation techniques you can begin practicing today include:

* Journaling
* Breathwork
* Meditation
* Mindfulness
* Visualization

## **Seek the Help of a Professional**

# **We Are Here to Help**

While stress is a useful and important emotion to have, chronic stress can begin to take a toll on a person's mental and physical health. If you have found yourself constantly in a state of stress, therapy may be just what you need to begin your journey to relief. Our therapists are here for you. [Reach out](http://michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php) to us today, and we will help you figure out why you are feeling stressed and healthy ways you can cope with it.

References

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