



Managing Stress

New Mexico Tech

High stress levels can have a negative effect on your health

Stress is a normal part of everyone's life. Stress is the result of a natural process, classically referred to as a fight or flight response, where your body decides to stay and fight impending danger or run from it. When you are put in a stressful situation, your heart rate and blood flow increase, getting your body ready to deal with a current crisis. Your body is suddenly energized and better equipped to complete the task that is being asked of it. In this way, occasional stress can be good.

When your body constantly is being assailed with demands—mental, physical or emotional—chronic stress begins to take hold. Chronic stress can lower your immune system, cause arrhythmia or irregular heart rate, chest pain and even heart attack and stroke. It can worsen conditions such as type 2 diabetes, asthma or gastrointestinal problems. Chronic stress can also lead to depression and anxiety, alcohol and tobacco use, poor eating habits and trouble sleeping.

Take steps to lower your stress level

- **Prioritize.** At the beginning of your day, review what you need to get done and prioritize what has to be done, what could be done and what can wait. Learn to say no if you can't reasonably accomplish an additional task.
- **Talk.** Bottling things up can add to your stress. Open up and talk to your closest friends or family members. Also consider talking with a therapist, doctor or church member, depending on the nature of the issue.
- **Count to 10.** This simple task can help you to clear your head. Breathe deeply and close your eyes while you do this.

- **Exercise.** Exercise is a natural stress reliever which releases endorphins into your bloodstream. Endorphins are chemicals that help your body to reduce stress. Also, exercise boosts immunity, among many other health benefits.
- **Meditation, Yoga and Pilates.** All three of these methods help promote deep breathing and becoming more in tune with your body. Take classes at your local gym, or get a video or DVD. All are relaxing, and Yoga and Pilates can help with strength and flexibility, as well.
- **Get enough sleep.** Go to bed on time to help you feel refreshed and awake the next day. A lack of sleep in itself can cause you to feel more stressed, or add to the stress of your day because it will be harder to concentrate. If your stressors are preventing you from falling asleep, go into another room and do a relaxing activity to help you feel sleepy, such as deep breathing, stretching or reading.

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