
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Stress Fact Sheet

What is Stress?

- Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to demands in our lives. It is the way our bodies react physically, emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally to any change in the status quo. Even imagined change can cause stress.
- Stress is highly individual. A situation that one person may find stressful may not bother another person. Stress occurs when something happens that we feel imposes a demand on us. When we perceive that we cannot cope, or feel inadequate to meet the demand, we begin to feel stress.
- Stress is not entirely bad. We need a certain amount of stress in our lives because it is stimulating and motivating. It gives us the energy to try harder and keeps us alert.
- When we find ourselves in situations that challenge us too much, we react with the “fight or flight” stress response.
- Stress actually begins in our brains and it is expressed in our body. Once we perceive stress, our body sends out chemical messengers in the form of stress hormones to help our bodies handle the stress.

What are Possible Symptoms of Stress?

- **Mental Symptoms:** forgetfulness, nervousness, confusion, poor concentration, lethargy, negativity, overly busy mind
- **Physical Symptoms:** tension, fatigue, insomnia, muscle aches, digestive upset, appetite change, headaches, restlessness
- **Emotional Symptoms:** anxiety, mood swings, irritability, depression, resentment, anger, impatience, worrying, feeling pressured
- **Social or Behavioral Symptoms:** lashing out, decreased sex drive, lack of intimacy, isolation, intolerance, loneliness, avoiding social situations, overuse of alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs
- **Spiritual Symptoms:** apathy, loss of direction, emptiness, loss of life’s meaning, unforgiving, no sense of purpose

Stress Facts (continued)

How Does Stress Affect Our Health And Our Lives?

- 75 to 90% of all medical office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints
- stress is linked to the 6 leading causes of death in America – heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide
- stress is also implicated in hypertension, smoking, obesity, alcoholism, drug abuse, gastrointestinal problems, arthritis, immune system disturbances, skin disorders, neurological conditions, etc.

What Can You Do About Stress?

Your reaction to stress is determined by a combination of factors including your physiology, past successes/failures in coping with stress, and interpretations of stressful events in your life. Managing stress effectively is a complex skill – one you can learn with time and active participation. Cultivating constructive thinking, maintaining an optimistic and hopeful outlook, and altering patterns of negative thinking are some of the more important strategies.

The following strategies also can be of value:

- **Physical techniques:**
 - Exercise regularly and aim for 20 to 30 minutes at least 3 times each week
 - Eat in moderation and choose a healthy diet
 - Stop smoking
 - Reduce alcohol
 - Limit Caffeine
 - Get adequate rest
- **Psychological techniques:**
 - Learn to relax both mind and body – try deep/abdominal breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and visualizing positive outcomes
 - Build some fun into your routine
 - Use humor
 - Learn to look differently at situations that cause stress
 - Learn to get along better with others
 - Find ways to manage your time effectively
 - Establish realistic expectations for yourself and others
- **Environmental techniques:**
 - Develop a social support network
 - Maintain a neat, clean, and comfortable work area
 - Improve lighting

Stress Facts (continued)

Reduce noise
Open windows if possible
Ban smoking
Consider a humidifier
Maintain indoor plants

When Is It Time To Ask For Help?

- If you feel trapped, as though there's nowhere to turn
- If you worry excessively and can't concentrate
- Remember, your Primary Care Team is here to help you.