

How Can I Manage Stress?

You can have a healthier heart when you make changes in your lifestyle. Managing your emotions better may help, because some people respond to certain situations in ways that can cause health problems for them. For

instance, someone feeling pressured by a difficult situation might start smoking or smoke more, overeat and gain weight. Finding more satisfactory ways to respond to pressure will help protect your health.

What is stress?

Stress is your body's response to change. It's a very individual thing. A situation that one person finds stressful may not bother someone else. For example, one person may become tense when driving; another person may find driving a source of relaxation and joy. Something that causes fear in some people, such as rock climbing, may be fun for others.

There's no way to say that one thing is "bad" or "stressful" because everyone's different. Not all stress is bad, either. Speaking to a group or watching a close football game can be stressful, but they can be fun, too. Life would be dull without some stress. The key is to manage stress properly, because unhealthy responses to it may lead to health problems in some people.



Exercise helps you let go of stress! It makes you feel stronger and healthier. It helps control your weight and makes your heart pump better.

How does stress make you feel?

- It can make you feel angry, afraid, excited or helpless.
- It can make it hard to sleep.
- It can give you aches in your head, neck, jaw and back.
- It can lead to habits like smoking, drinking, overeating or drug abuse.
- You may not even feel it at all, even though your body suffers from it.

How can I cope with it?

Outside events (like problems with your boss, preparing to move or worrying about a child's wedding) can be upsetting. But remember that it's not the outside force, but how you react to it inside that's important. You can't control all the outside events in your life, but you can change how you handle them emotionally and psychologically. Here are some good ways to cope:

- Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly, breathe deeply and think of a peaceful picture.
- Try to learn to accept things you can't change.

You don't have to solve all of life's problems. Talk out your troubles and look for the good instead of the bad in situations.

- Engage in physical activity regularly. Do what you enjoy — walk, swim, ride a bike or jog to get your big muscles going. Letting go of the tension in your body will help you feel better.
- Limit alcohol, don't overeat and don't smoke.

How can I live a more relaxed life?

- Think ahead about what may upset you. Some things you can avoid. For example, spend less time with people who bother you or avoid driving in rush-hour traffic.
- Think about problems and try to solve them. You could talk to your boss about difficulties at work, talk with your neighbor if his dog bothers you, or get help when you have too much to do.

- Change how you respond to difficult situations. Be positive, not negative.
- Learn to say "no." Don't promise too much.
- Give yourself enough time to get things done.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.

3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

How can family and friends help?

Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.*

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