



Managing Stress

Stress is a risk factor that is a part of everyone's life, but it can be controlled. Stress is a response to change — it can be positive or negative. Stress may be positive in small doses. It can help your body work better, improve your concentration and allow you to do certain tasks better. However, stress becomes negative when you cannot relax or it is a constant part of your life. Then, the body and mind are unable to adapt and cope, and your health may suffer.

Stress

- + Makes your heart beat faster
- + Increases your breathing rate
- + Increases blood pressure
- + Causes the blood vessels to get smaller
- + Injures blood vessels and can cause plaques to build up more quickly

Daily hassles are often sources of stress. These may be:

- + **Situational**, such as rush hour traffic, family visits or a problem at work
- + **Mental or emotional**, such as worrying about your health, anger at someone's behavior, sadness or fear
- + **Physical**, such as chest pain, headache, muscle ache or a response to caffeine
- + **Behavioral**, such as yelling, overeating, smoking or excess alcohol intake

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Once you notice stress, it is important to decrease or manage that stress. If you alter the way you look at stress, you can change how it affects you. This will reduce stress symptoms, anxiety, worrying and negative thought. It will also increase concentration, awareness, energy, self-acceptance and inner peace.

With relaxation, your heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate and muscle tension go down. Methods to relax and reduce stress include exercise, social support, yoga, meditation, diaphragmatic breathing, imagery, repetitive prayer, progressive muscle relaxation, repetitive exercise, mindfulness (being in the moment) and body scan.

The four-step approach to reducing stress

- + **STOP** — When you feel stress, stop. Break out of the stress response.
- + **BREATHE** — Take a deep breath release physical tension.
- + **REFLECT** — Focus your energy on the problem at hand and reflect on the cause of the stress.
- + **CHOOSE** — Choose how you want to react.

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