

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.

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 a lot 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 us online at 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!*

What are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack and Stroke?

Warning Signs of Heart Attack:

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- Chest discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

Warning Signs of Stroke:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor or nurse?

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

How can family and friends help?

It's never too late to stop smoking



Stopping smoking – stepping forward

Deciding to stop smoking is one of the best choices you will ever make. Know that it is never too late to quit. People who quit smoking may live longer. This is true even for people who quit later in life.

To get support to stop smoking, contact these organizations.

American Heart Association
800-242-8721
www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association
800-586-4872
To speak with a lung health professional,
call 800-548-8252.
www.lungusa.org

Tips for stopping smoking

- Write down why you want to quit.** You might list “Having more energy” or “Living longer”
- Set a quit date.** Choose a low-stress time to quit
- Ask your doctor about treatments that can help you stop smoking.** These can help stop the urge to smoke
- Find things to replace smoking.** Sugarless gum or candy can keep your mouth busy
- Be active during the day.** Being active can help lessen the stress of quitting
- Relax before bedtime.** Try taking a hot bath and drinking hot, noncaffeinated herbal tea or milk just before bedtime
- Get help from others.** Ask your doctor or area hospital about local support groups. For online support, check out *Freedom From Smoking*® on the American Lung Association Web site (see listing above). And ask those close to you for support as you are quitting
- Stick with it!** Most smokers have to “practice” quitting several times before they stop for good

Talk with your doctor about ways to stop smoking.

Keeping track of your heart health



Know your numbers — protect your heart

One way to protect your heart is to learn your goal numbers. You and your doctor may have decided on goal numbers for blood pressure, cholesterol, and other factors. Reaching and staying at your goal numbers may help keep your heart healthy.

- Use your Heart-Healthy Tracker to write down your goal numbers and test results
- Bring it with you when you visit your doctor
- Use it to set goal numbers with your doctor
- Track your progress over time

Heart-Healthy Tracker

What you need to have checked	Suggested goal numbers	Your personal goal numbers	Your results	Your results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood pressure If you <i>do not have</i> diabetes: 	Less than 140/90 mmHg	(Systolic/Diastolic) ____ / ____	Date: _____ ____ / ____	Date: _____ ____ / ____
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDL cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol) 	Less than 100 mg/dL	_____	Date: _____ _____	Date: _____ _____
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol) 	More than 40 mg/dL	_____	Date: _____ _____	Date: _____ _____
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triglycerides (a kind of fat in the blood) 	Less than 150 mg/dL	_____	Date: _____ _____	Date: _____ _____
For people with diabetes:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood pressure 	Less than 130/80 mmHg	(Systolic/Diastolic) ____ / ____	Date: _____ ____ / ____	Date: _____ ____ / ____
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A1C 	Less than 7%	_____	Date: _____ _____	Date: _____ _____

Your doctor can help you meet your goals

Ask your doctor about changes you can make. These may include diet or being more active.