

Managing Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. Sometimes, it can even be helpful, like when a deadline motivates you to focus. However, ongoing stress can wear you down, affecting your mood, sleep, physical well-being, and ability to think clearly.

Everyone experiences stress differently. It can stem from external events, such as losing a job, or from internal pressures, such as expecting too much of yourself. When you're under stress, your body and mind use extra energy to stay balanced, which can leave you feeling drained. The good news? Because many stress triggers come from our habits and thoughts, you can take meaningful steps to manage them.

Common signs of stress

- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Feeling angry or tense
- Trouble focusing or making decisions
- Tight or sore muscles

Simple ways to manage stress

Many signs of stress overlap with depression and anxiety. The same small daily actions that help you manage mood can also help ease stress. Some strategies include:

- **Moving your body.** Regular exercise releases built-up energy and tension.

- **Limit your caffeine intake.** Cut back on coffee, soda, and energy drinks that make you feel jittery.
- **Pace yourself.** Take short breaks during the day to reset and breathe.
- **Prioritize rest.** Build healthy sleep habits, like going to bed and waking up at the same time each day.
- **Check your thoughts.** Notice negative self-talk and replace it with kinder, more realistic messages.
- **Stay organized.** Feeling stressed often comes from feeling overwhelmed. Using organizational tools like checklists, calendars, or task apps on your phone can help you stay on top of commitments.
- **Reframe challenges.** Look for positive aspects or lessons in difficult situations.
- **Remember to laugh.** Humor helps release tension and keep things in perspective.
- **Stay connected.** Talk with friends, family, or a support group. Sharing how you feel can feel like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders.
- **Try relaxation techniques.** Experiment with deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, or guided imagery to calm your body and mind.

You may need to try a few strategies before finding what works best for you. With time and practice, managing stress can become part of your daily routine.

For more mental health educational resources, visit depressioncenter.org/toolkit.

This document provides general educational information developed by the Eisenberg Family Depression Center. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult your health care provider if you have questions about your health or treatment options.