



# Coping with stress through lifestyle management

## Are you at risk for stress?

Are you feeling the effects of stress? Or, do you become stressed easily? Making lifestyle changes may help reduce your stress. Following are ways you can change your lifestyle for the better. This can help you cope with stress.

## A healthy lifestyle

Taking care of yourself is the first step in stress management. Adopting a healthier lifestyle can help prevent stress.

- **Avoid cigarettes.** Quitting smoking is the most important step you can take to prevent illness and early death. And the effects of smoking can be reversed. People tend to smoke more when under stress.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise can help you look and feel better. Different kinds of exercise provide different health benefits.
- **Eat sensibly.** A balanced diet is key to maintaining good health and a proper weight. It can also help prevent stress.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Restful sleep helps you maintain good health. It makes coping with problems easier too.
- **Drink only in moderation.** Alcohol is often used to reduce stress because it has a relaxing effect. Regular, heavy use of alcohol can lead to disease. Drinking and driving may result in fatal or crippling accidents.
- **Avoid too much caffeine.** Caffeine is in many products such as coffee and sodas. It has a stimulating effect on the body. This can make the effects of stress worse.
- **Use care when taking medications.** Some over-the-counter drugs may provide temporary relief from stress. But they do not solve the problems that cause it. You should see your provider if you feel the need to take these drugs for a long time. If you take a prescription medication to manage stress, remember to take it as directed. Talk to your doctor if you need more of the medication to achieve the same results.
- **Be safety-conscious.** Falls and injuries from accidents can lead to hospitalization and disability. Good safety at home, work and on the road prevents accidents and injuries.
- **Get preventive health care.** Regular health check-ups help prevent disease by catching problems early. They can then be addressed before they get worse.
- **Spend time with friends with whom you can talk openly.** People who give and receive regular support tend to have fewer health problems. They cope better with stress too.
- **Develop a routine.** Eating, sleeping and doing other things at the same time every day makes you feel in control. This helps reduce stress.

- **Learn to manage stress.** Some stress is normal. These steps can keep daily stress from becoming a problem:
  - Take time to relax
  - Talk with a friend
  - Keep things in perspective

### Are you ready to make a lifestyle change?

Here are some tips to help you make successful lifestyle changes:

- **Set realistic goals.** Make sure the goals you set are within your reach. Be mindful of your budget, time and other personal factors. Many people forget to think about these things. As a result, they set unrealistic goals.
- **Be specific and put it in writing.** Be as exact as possible when setting your goals. People who set specific goals are more likely to succeed. Write down what you want to achieve. Post it in a place where you will see it every day. This will help remind you what you're working toward.
- **Develop an action plan.** Create a timeline with steps toward your goal. Set deadlines for all steps and cross them off as you go. Just watching your list get smaller can give you a sense of accomplishment. This can help keep you going.
- **Believe in yourself.** Stay positive about your progress. Share your goals with a friend. Ask him or her to help you to keep your spirits up.
- **Reward yourself.** Celebrate your achievements, even the small ones. Reaching a goal takes hard work. You should be proud of your efforts.
- **Develop a plan to address roadblocks or steps backward.** It is common to reach a plateau or slip back to old patterns. Write down a plan with the steps you will take to meet your goals to stay on track. This will help if you become discouraged.

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