



September

Member Newsletter

Counter the mind-body effects of stress

From the lingering pandemic and troubling events to hectic work/life challenges, there's plenty of stress going around these days. Whatever the source, most of us focus on the common emotional signs of stress—we're tense, moody, restless and overwhelmed. It's vital to know how your body indicates that you're stressed and equally important to take measures to manage stress no matter how it shows up. Be alert to the following:

 **Aching, sore muscles.** Stress prompts the output of adrenaline, which triggers ongoing tension, making your head, neck, or even your legs and other muscles rigid and sore. Manage it by getting up to stretch or walk periodically. Excess caffeine can also be a culprit, so try cutting back on your consumption.

 **Getting more colds than usual.** Stress can run down your immune system. Bolster it by getting sound sleep, drinking plenty of water and eating nutrient-dense foods. Remember to use good hygiene—regular handwashing, avoid sharing food and utensils, and use hand sanitizers. Maintain your distance or wear a mask if you need to visit someone who has a cold or flu, and be sure to get a flu shot as fall approaches.

 **Your digestive system has gone haywire.** Heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, GERD or other tummy troubles can be triggered by stress-induced stomach acid production. Avoid known stomach irritants such as alcohol, coffee, spicy foods and mints. Treat mild symptoms with antacids and other over-the-counter medications. Soothe yourself with deep-breathing exercises, walking and other enjoyable physical activities.

 **Lost sleep.** Excessive worrying prior to bedtime can boost adrenaline levels, keeping you tossing and turning. Stash troubling thoughts in a worry journal, and try a relaxing wind-down routine that includes meditation or focusing on pleasant thoughts to usher you into deep slumber.

 **Troubled skin or hair.** Stress can stimulate inflammatory skin cells that contribute to dryness, itchiness, and hair loss, and can also prompt flare-ups of acne, eczema, psoriasis and other existing skin conditions. Again, stick to nutritious eating, exercise, and try meditation or other mind-body therapies, which may help regulate the stress hormones with positive effects for skin and hair.

 **Other effects and what to do.** Stress may also be at play if you're overeating, drinking more alcohol, experiencing a low sex drive or have irregular periods. Talk to your health practitioner and/or seek help from a qualified counselor for help with stress management strategies.

Sources:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/stress-may-be-getting-to-your-skin-but-its-not-a-one-way-street-2021041422334>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20046037>



If continuing moodiness is affecting your life, talk to your health practitioner about a referral for counseling, or speak with a qualified counselor.

Protect your mood

Being on a roller coaster of fluctuating moods can affect your relationships, work and more. By changing your habits, it's possible to take charge of your moods and feel more stable, enabling you to experience life more positively without being a prisoner of your emotions. Here are some suggestions:

Don't let your feelings fester. Admit them, and consider if something happened in the last 24 hours to trigger your negativity. Are there issues that you've put off dealing with or problems that you should address?

Consider if a particular person or situation prompts a bad mood. Figure ways to limit your time with them or the situation. Are you trying to change things you really can't control, or do you expect a different, unlikely, outcome? Try to accept people and things as they are.

Don't catch a bad mood. Are you feeling susceptible to someone else's strong emotions? Try focusing on something else—or take a brisk walk.

Set boundaries. When you feel confused and helpless about circumstances that seem out of your control, stop and ask: "How much of what's going on here is really about me?" A healthy separation from the news or irritating people, for example, can help prevent emotional overload.

Give yourself some space. When your mood dips, try to limit the major chores, decisions, or projects you need to handle—if possible, wait to deal with these things once your mood has improved.

Practice gratitude, being thankful for even the little things in life. Done daily, it can remind you of the joy you have experienced and you'll begin to see your life through a more positive lens.

In a continual funk? Take more active measures—you have a choice to change your mood. Talking it out with someone close to you, writing in a journal, listening to soothing music, joining a support group and carving out time to attend to your own needs, hobbies and relaxation when you're feeling overwhelmed are all ways to help yourself feel better balanced, get back to a more even keel, and feel upbeat.

Choosing feel-good foods

Have you ever thought about how the foods you eat may affect the way you feel? Certain food can make you feel good—or bad—for different reasons. Whether it's the food itself, its taste, your nutrition goals or what you associate with the food, choosing feel-good foods can help you stay on track with your health and well-being. Read on to learn more!

Focus on nutrient-dense foods. Nutrient-dense foods are rich in vitamins, minerals and nutrients that are required for good health. Examples include fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods, nuts, seeds, healthy oils and lean proteins.

Boost your brain power. Foods that benefit your brain include those high in healthy fats like avocados, olives and olive oil, nuts and seeds, fish and lean meats, and nutritious carbs like whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Eat regularly. Skipping meals or having an irregular eating schedule can result in an imbalance of hormones that can make you irritable or “hangry.”

Focus on healthy fats—they are a great source of energy and help your body absorb vitamins and minerals from foods! Include nuts, healthy oils such as olive and canola, avocado and cold-water fish, such as salmon and trout, in your diet.



Consider your nutrition goals. If you're working toward a specific goal, selecting foods that benefit this goal will give you a boost in confidence and motivation, whereas if you regularly choose foods that are not in line with your goal, you may feel frustrated and discouraged.

Make your favorite comfort foods healthier. Whether it is an old family recipe or just a traditional “comfort” food, consider what you can do to make the recipe help you feel good and be healthy. For example, swap whole grain flour for white flour, oil for butter, fruit for sugar and more!

Avoid loading up on sugar, caffeine and “junk” foods.

While they may provide a temporary pick-me-up, they result in a “crash.” Enjoy these foods in moderation and as a way to treat yourself. Little indulgences of this type can be nourishing!

For more help, talk to Health Advocate, your health practitioner or a licensed counselor.

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month: Getting Help Is a Strength



Suicide is a leading cause of death in the U.S. The current economic decline, financial loss, and other troubling events have increased many risk factors for suicide, such as depression. But depression can be treated and there is support to overcome your struggles and renew hope. **Know the warning signs.** If you or someone you know is talking about suicide, withdrawing from friends and family, expressing hopelessness, has experienced a painful event, is disinterested in activities or seeking access to a weapon, pills, or other potential means of harm, **get help.** Call the 24/7 **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** to connect with a trained counselor, or call **911.** For more information, visit: www.cdc.gov/suicide/

HealthAdvocateSM