



# Reduce Stress

## CHALLENGE

Learn to manage stress in healthy ways

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Reduce Stress."
2. Manage stress in healthy ways on at least 22 days this month.
3. Keep a record of your completed challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



You battle rush-hour traffic. Your email inbox is jammed with messages. Your phone buzzes constantly. Running 15 minutes late is the norm. Your boss just called an emergency meeting, but didn't provide any details. It's a typical day at the office for a lot of people. And it's stressful.

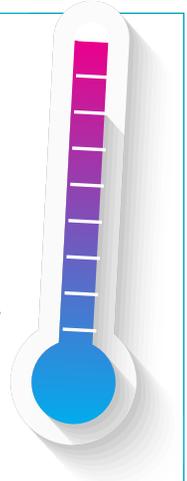
Then there's everything that happens outside the office. Parenting, car trouble, financial problems, a rocky relationship. Or worse, a serious illness or death of a loved one. Even good things can be stressful like getting married, moving, or starting a new job. Are you feeling stressed out just thinking about this stuff?

You're not alone. Chronic stress is a big problem for a lot of adults. A recent study found that money, work, family responsibilities, and health concerns are the biggest sources of stress for most people.<sup>1</sup> If you don't deal with stress in your life in healthy ways, it can lead to bigger problems.

Do you know how to recognize stress? And do you know what to do about it? How you deal with stress can make all the difference to your health and happiness. Take the month-long Health Challenge to Reduce Stress.

How well do you manage stress in your life? Take this quiz to find out.

- |    | YES                      | NO                       |  |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's difficult for me to stay calm when I'm frustrated.                          |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I feel angry, distracted, or moody often.  |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I worry a lot about work, money, health, or my relationships.                    |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I often feel overwhelmed, lonely, or depressed.                                  |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I often have headaches, nausea, dizziness, bowel discomfort, or rapid heartbeat. |



If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, stress may be a problem. Too much stress can impact your mood and behavior. It can even impair memory and judgement. Stress can even lead to serious health problems. However, you can learn to manage stress in healthy ways.

## The Trouble with Too Much Stress

When you visit the doctor for aches and pains, the common cold or other health issues, stress may actually be the real issue. An estimated 80 percent of all primary care visits are linked to stress, according to a recent study.<sup>2</sup>

When you experience a stressful event, hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) flood your circulatory system to help you take swift action. But if a stressful situation isn't resolved, chronic stress can lead to:<sup>3</sup>

- Sleep disorders
- Heart disease
- Eating disorders
- Anxiety
- Addictive behaviors
- Depression
- Headaches
- Digestive problems
- Fatigue
- Anger
- High blood pressure
- And more

**Stress management:**  
 Know your triggers  
[tinyurl.com/kdt6r2e](https://tinyurl.com/kdt6r2e)

# 13 Ways to Reduce Stress



When you start feeling stressed out, take action to keep stress from harming your health. You may not be able to resolve your problems right away, but you can change the way you react to them. Here's how:

**1. Breathe deeply.** Take 10 breaths of fresh outdoor air. Deep breathing has a calming effect that can reduce stressful feelings such as anger, anxiety, and fear. Making this a regular habit can also help lower blood pressure, increase your energy level, and help you sleep better.<sup>4</sup>

**2. Exercise.** Just 20 to 30 minutes of daily walking, yoga, or another form of exercise can improve your mood as well as physical health. Physical activity burns up stress hormones, and stimulates the mind to help you relax and think better about your problems.<sup>5</sup>

**3. Do something you really enjoy.** Take up a hobby like painting, cooking, photography, fishing, or playing music. This can take your mind off the stressful things in your life and help you see your situation in a different way.

**4. Learn to communicate better.** Listen to what others say. Give clear, assertive statements about what you need to accomplish your work or improve your relationship. Be realistic and willing to compromise to solve a problem.

**5. Get enough sleep.** Aim to sleep 7 to 8 hours a night. If that's a challenge, take a nap during the day too. Adequate sleep can eliminate stress and restore the body to a relaxed state.<sup>6</sup>

**6. Live within a budget.** Overspending, debt, and worrying about money are common sources of stress. Create a budget, and live within your means.

**7. Talk over a problem with a friend,** your supervisor, or religious leader. Just sharing your concerns about something often brings relief, support, and courage to carry on. It can also help you cope better with anxiety, stress, depression, illness, and other crises.<sup>7</sup>

**8. Eat a healthy diet.** You'll cope with stress better if you're getting the vitamins and nutrients you need. Eat a healthy breakfast every day. Cut back on sweets, soda, and fast food. Eat more fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and whole grains.

**9. Limit caffeine.** Caffeine raises stress hormones, which can make it difficult to relax and sleep.

**10. Just say "no."** You can't do everything all at once at work or at home. Learn to say "no" if you need to. Delegate responsibilities. Ask for help. Set priorities and be realistic about what you can handle.

**11. Laugh more.** Watch a funny movie. Read a joke book. Or look up funny videos on YouTube. Research shows that laughing reduces stress and releases endorphins that can improve your mood and your health.

**12. Don't sweat the small stuff.** You'll feel better if you don't let things like traffic jams or crying babies bother you. If you get upset easily, practice correcting yourself when something sets you off. If you feel the urge to shout at a careless driver, stop yourself. Replace that thought with something like, "He must be late for an important meeting," or "She must be having a bad day."

**13. Get professional help if needed.** A professional counselor can help you deal with financial worries or personal problems. Or you can work with a dietician, fitness coach, spiritual advisor, or life coach. Getting help is a healthy way to reduce stress.

The next time you're feeling stressed out, resist the urge to honk your horn, send an angry email, or eat to calm your nerves. Instead, take a step back. Recognize you're feeling stress. Then use one of these coping strategies to help you reduce stress, feel better, and improve your health.

**Quiz: Test Your Stress Smarts!**  
[tinyurl.com/ctncwax](http://tinyurl.com/ctncwax)

**Infographic: Stress in America**  
[tinyurl.com/mfvfysv](http://tinyurl.com/mfvfysv)

## References (accessed on March 16, 2017)

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7. Ozbay, F., et al. (2007). Social support and resilience to stress. *Psychiatry*, 4(5):35-40. <http://tinyurl.com/n77ja2b>.



# Reduce Stress

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### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you manage your stress in healthy ways.
3. Use the calendar to record the actions and choices you make to help you form a habit of managing stress.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you practiced healthy ways to manage stress. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [ ] ex. min. _____							
HC [ ] ex. min. _____							
HC [ ] ex. min. _____							
HC [ ] ex. min. _____							
HC [ ] ex. min. _____							

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I managed stress  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

Other wellness projects completed this month:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_