

# Stressing the stress levels



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## STOP STRESSING!

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Those of you who stress daily probably hear this phrase way too often.

Stress is an emotional, psychological or physical factor that causes bodily or mental tension. The outcome is normally from an event or thought that resulted in frustration, anger or uneasiness. Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand.

Every reaction is split between acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress is normal, short-term and goes away quickly. Chronic stress is the type to be more mindful of, because it lasts for a longer period of time and may lead to health problems.

## EFFECTS OF STRESS

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Every person reacts to stress in a different way. By releasing certain hormones, you are telling your body whether it should be on alert, which causes muscle tension and increases your pulse, or whether your brain should relax and handle the situation.

The wear and tear of stress is physical, as well as emotional. Stress causes your body to release hormones like epinephrine, norepinephrine and cortisol, so every time you stress, it increases your blood pressure and heart rate. Too much epinephrine can cause insomnia or lowered immunity toward illness and nervousness. Other side effects of stress include fatigue, depression and anxiety.

## EXERCISING ISN'T SO BAD

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Exercise is a perfect, stress-busting benefit to pump up your endorphins, also known as your feel-good neurotransmitters. Getting your endorphins and emotions in check can be easier than you think. Laps in the pool, a nature hike or even a brisk walk or jog can relieve the tension quickly and improve your mood. Regular exercise can also increase confidence, relax you and decrease psychological and physical strain.

The Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity. To break the math down to what you need daily, it results in 21.5 min/day or 10.8 min/day.

## STICK WITH IT

4

If you hate running, then do something else. One of the most important things to remember is to incorporate consistency. Do what you love, and fit it to your schedule.

Work, school, kids and busy schedules can be difficult, but as long as your routine is realistic, you can do it. Exercise in the morning or evening; just carve out some time to lessen stress and take care of yourself every day.

## GETTING ON THE RIGHT WAVELENGTH

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Meditation is a great exercise for the mind and a great way to relieve stress any time of the day. Stress may not be unavoidable, but this relaxation technique can decrease your heart rate, slow your breathing, stabilize your blood pressure and relax your muscles.

The Mayo Clinic recommends meditation to "focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress."

Just as there are many exercises fit for you, there are many types of meditation and relaxation techniques. Qi gong, tai chi and yoga are forms of meditation that use physical movement and breathing exercises to restore the balance you need.

## STRESS CAN BE GOOD

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Stress is inevitable, but improving the way you respond can help you avoid the situations that generate harmful stress.

In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when it helps you avoid danger, meet a deadline or reach a goal. Even though some stress can be harmful, moderate stress levels for short periods may improve your heart and protect your body from infection.

## DON'T STRESS

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Don't stress your body out more. If you haven't exercised for some time, consult your doctor first. Exercise routines are important, and your doctor can recommend a great fitness plan with your health concerns in mind. Remember, each body is different, so each exercise program will be too. Whether through exercise or meditation, we can "rewire" our brains to react to stress differently, making the next stressful event easier to handle.

*Always consult your doctor before starting any new treatment, exercise program or diet. A health care professional will be able to help you properly decide what kind of treatment will be most beneficial for your individual needs.*