

Managing the pressures of stress



Stress is a normal part of life, and it affects everyone in one way or another. Low to moderate levels of stress can actually be good for you when managed properly. But extreme levels of stress can take a physical and mental toll on your health and contribute to severe problems such as heart attack, stroke and depression.

Although you can't completely eliminate tension from your life, you can reduce your emotional and physical stress levels by making small changes. Try the following tips to help manage your stress:

Understand how you experience stress

Everyone experiences stress differently. How do you know when you are under extreme stress? You may think or behave differently from times when you do not feel stressed.

Identify your stressors

What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Are they related to your children, family, health, finances, work, relationships or something else?

Learn your own stress signals

You may have a hard time concentrating and making decisions, feel angry, irritable or out of control. Some people experience headaches, muscle tension or a lack of energy when stress is high.

Looking for additional stress management tips? You'll find them on the following page.



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Stress-busting strategies

Recognize how you deal with stress

Determine if you are using unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol or over/under eating to cope. Are these routine behaviors, or are they specific to certain events or situations? Do you make unhealthy choices as a result of feeling rushed and overwhelmed?

Find healthy ways to manage stress

Consider healthy, stress-reducing activities like meditation, physical activity or talking things out with friends or family. Keep in mind that unhealthy behaviors develop over time and can be difficult to change. Try not to take on too much at once. Focus on changing only one behavior at a time.

Take care of yourself

Eat right, get enough sleep, drink plenty of water and engage in regular physical activity. Ensure you have a healthy mind and body through activities like yoga, walking or playing sports. Take regular vacations and breaks from work. No matter how hectic life gets, make time for yourself.

Reach out for support

Accepting help from supportive friends and family may improve your ability to manage stress. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist or counselor who can help you better identify and change unhealthy behaviors.

Do you long to be stress-free?

Turn to the Personal Health Manager's *Live Well* feature to help equip yourself to handle life's challenges, like work-life balance and relationship issues. This is one of the many wellness resources available to you from Blue Access® for Members.