



MANAGING STRESS DURING STRESSFUL TIMES

Stress and pressure have always been a part of life. But add in COVID-19 and conflicts around the world, and the stage is set for a major mental health crisis.

Important for our survival, stress kicks in when we need that extra boost of energy and motivation to perform under pressure. Whether we're running from a dangerous situation or need to stay awake to meet an looming deadline, the body's autonomic nervous systems signal changes in our heart rate, breathing patterns, vision and more. This is commonly referred to as the "fight-or-flight response."

While some stress is necessary for survival, it also can be harmful when it lasts for prolonged periods of time. Physical symptoms of chronic (long-term) stress include:

- ✔ General aches and pains
- ✔ Chest pain or the feeling that your heart is racing
- ✔ Exhaustion
- ✔ Trouble sleeping
- ✔ Headaches
- ✔ Dizziness or shaking
- ✔ High blood pressure
- ✔ Muscle tension or clenched jaw
- ✔ Digestive problems
- ✔ Changes in sexual function
- ✔ Frequent illnesses

Prolonged stress often can lead to conditions like anxiety, depression, panic attacks and ongoing sadness. Desperate for relief, some people try to manage these uncomfortable feelings by drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, finding comfort in unhealthy foods or overeating, and focusing attention on compulsive behaviors like shopping or spending too much time on the internet. Some even attempt to self-medicate with tobacco and illegal drugs. These short-term solutions generally do nothing but cause more stress and other health consequences.

While difficult to diagnose, there are steps everyone can take to reduce their stress—especially before it gets to the point of disrupting daily life.

WHAT'S NEW AT YOUR HOSPITAL

- Matthew Whaley is our **new chief executive officer**. He is a veteran healthcare executive with a proven track record in leading community hospitals.
- We have launched a **new user-friendly website** to inform you of our clinical services and news from our hospital. Check us out at communityhospitalhp.com.

7 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

There's no way to completely eliminate stress, but there are proven strategies that will help most people minimize its impact.

1 STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE



Physical activity is like a natural drug because it helps the body release “feel-good” chemicals called endorphins. While most healthcare providers recommend 30 minutes of exercise 5 days a week, any amount of activity—from walking faster to stretching more—is helpful.

2 EAT A HEALTHY DIET



Some foods can actually lower stress by reducing cortisol levels, the primary hormone responsible for stress. In fact, foods commonly found in the Mediterranean diet are big stress relievers, so stock up on fish, poultry, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and foods with healthy fats like salmon.

3 LIMIT OR ELIMINATE ALCOHOL



An alcoholic beverage here and there may make you feel less stressed, but over time, our bodies require larger quantities to produce the same results. Additionally, alcohol is more difficult to metabolize than other foods and drinks, resulting in even more stress on the body.

4 GET ENOUGH SLEEP



Sleep is one of the most powerful stress relievers, but can be difficult to get. This is especially true during pandemic times when more than half of Americans are having trouble sleeping. Since sleep and good health are so closely related, seek help if you go for more than a few weeks without quality sleep.

5 LEARN TO SAY NO



Being busy is good for mental health, but taking on more than you can handle is stressful. The trick is being mindful of when you say “yes” and when you say “no.” Be open to new experiences and opportunities, but never forget there's great power in the word “no.”

6 ACCEPT THE THINGS BEYOND YOUR CONTROL



One of the most difficult life lessons is accepting that we're not in control of everything that impacts us. Just turn on the TV to prove that theory. Becoming very clear on what you can and cannot control, then focusing your energy accordingly, often helps.

7 STAY SOCIALLY CONNECTED



Social isolation and loneliness are associated with poor mental health, while socialization triggers the body to release hormones that lower anxiety. Being social also helps most people direct their energy outward rather than inward. You don't have to be popular. Just having a few reliable people in your life can make a big difference.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, don't wait. **Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255).**

If you feel stressed longer than usual, make an appointment with your healthcare provider today. It's important to rule out any underlying causes so you can better manage stress during these tremendously stressful times.

If you'd like to receive this newsletter every month, please email

✉ communityHP@pipelinehealth.us

with “Health Connection” in the subject line.