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# Stress

**Stress is what you feel when you react to pressure. Pressure can come from things like work, family, money, illness, or from an internal need such as wanting to achieve a goal, wanting to fit in, or the way you feel about yourself. Everyone handles stress differently.**

## The Stress Response

The *Stress Response* floods your body with chemicals made to prepare you for “fight or flight”. This helps you react quickly under pressure, gets you ready to meet challenges, and it is helpful in true emergencies. The Stress Response is a normal reaction, but it can be harmful if it goes on too long.

After the pressure or emergency situation has passed the Stress Response is supposed to turn off so your body can rest. If your body is constantly in “fight of flight” mode it can wear your body down. If this continues for a long time it can have negative affects on your physical health and wellbeing.

## Signs Your Stress Response is Overworking

### Change in Feelings

- Feeling sad, edgy, irritable, anxious, or panicked, much of the time
- Blaming other people for bad things that happen to you

### Symptoms of Depression

- Only seeing the down side of situations
- Feeling like things that you used to enjoy aren't fun now

### Physical Ailments

- Dry mouth or skin problems
- Loss of appetite or need to eat constantly
- Headaches, stomachaches, diarrhea or constipation
- Trouble sleeping

# How Stress Harms Your Health

Stress can contribute to the following conditions:

- Anxiety Disorder
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Hair loss
- Heart disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Sexual Dysfunction
- Tooth and gum disease
- Ulcers
- Weight gain or loss

# How to Lower Your Stress Level

## Don't Over Schedule Yourself

Leave room in your life for the things you like to do, for things that make you laugh, and for moments with friends and family.

## Make a List and Ask for Help

Make a list of all the things that have to get done. Decide which ones are the most important, which are less important and can wait, and which you can get help with. Then work on them one by one.

## Have Healthy Habits

Exercise, eat well and get enough sleep.

## Relax

Take time to unwind and calm down everyday. Try going for walks, reading, doing a craft, sitting and enjoying time with friends or family. Follow the guide below to engage your relaxation response.

# Starting a Relaxation Response Practice

**The *Relaxation Response* is a state of rest that is the opposite of the Stress Response. The Relaxation Response tells your body to stop the fight or flight mode.**

1. Set aside 10 to 20 minutes once or twice each day to practice a Relaxation Method.
2. Try to find a quiet place where you can sit or lie down alone to practice.
3. Pick one of the following methods to use. You may need to try a few to see which one you like the best, or you can alternate them. Each can create deep relaxation:
  - Deep Breathing
  - Tense & Relax (Progressive Muscle Relaxation)
  - Guided or Visual Imagery
  - Mindful Meditation

**Ask your health care provider about handouts on Relaxation, Mindful Meditation, Deep Breathing, Guided Imagery and the Tense & Relax Method.**

