



## Personal Action Plan

Developing a personal action plan helps us manage stress to live a long, healthy life. To develop your action plan for coping with stress, complete the following steps:

1. Write down two or three of your major stressors.

(Sources of stress from previous page)

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2. Determine a realistic goal for each stressor and write it down. (How do you want things to be?)

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3. Identify activities or strategies that will help you complete each goal. (What do you need to do to reach this goal?)

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4. Determine how much time you will need to reach each goal.

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5. Think about who might help you reach each goal.

(Who can you depend on to hold you accountable for reaching your goal?)

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6. How will you celebrate when you reach each goal?

(What can you do for yourself to celebrate this accomplishment?)

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*Adapted with permission from Kentucky Cooperative Extension*



### For more information

about stress management, visit these websites:

**National Institute of Mental Health**

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml)

**The American Institute for Stress**

[www.stress.org](http://www.stress.org)

**National Institutes of Health**

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html)

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Nourishing Your Mind and Body:

# Manage Stress for Better Health

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# STRESS

## What is Stress?

People have different definitions of stress. Probably the most common definition is “physical, mental or emotion strain or tension.” Stress is different for all of us. People will perceive the same stressor in a number of ways and, therefore, react to it differently. An event can be overwhelming to one person and exciting to another. For example, many politicians, comedians and public speakers truly enjoy appearing on stage in front of huge crowds, while the same situation provides anxiety and fear for other people.

## Is Stress a Problem?

Not all stress is bad. One type of stress is called “good stress,” which can inspire and motivate us in certain situations. For example, some people experience an increase in heart rate before a presentation that actually helps them succeed. However, when situations are perceived as nonstopping, this type of stress is called “bad stress” or “chronic stress.” When stress is not managed in a positive manner, a person’s physical and mental health can be affected.

- An estimated 75 to 90 percent of all visits to primary-care physicians are due to stress-related disorders
- Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death in North America: heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory diseases, accidents and diabetes.
- Nine out of 10 adults report they have experienced serious stress at some point in their life.

Stress has become a pervasive challenge in our society and can have a profound impact on our quality of life and health. The key is to prevent serious problems due to stress by equipping yourself with the skills to help you during these difficult times.



## Stress and Your Health



Constant stress can lead to many diseases. For example, high blood pressure as a result of stress can cause heart problems, including heart attacks. Stress also can cause headaches, migraines, back pain and ulcers. Research also has associated stress with a weak immune system. Because the immune system is responsible for fighting diseases and germs that attack the body, a person with chronic stress could become ill more frequently.

In addition, people who experience chronic stress may try to find relief from drugs, smoking or alcohol. However, these types of stimulants provide a feeling of relief that lasts only for a brief period of time. In the long term, the person is likely to become addicted, causing the stress to get worse.

### Common Symptoms of Stress

- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping excessively
- Low energy
- Frequent colds and infections
- Muscle tension and aches
- Increased substance use
- Crying spells
- Poor concentration
- Constant worry
- Feeling blue
- Tension and irritability
- Difficulty making decisions

Can you tell when you are experiencing stress? What are your personal warning signs?

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### Sources of Stress

Once you realize you are stressed, determining what is causing you stress is important to control it. Think about two or three factors that cause you the highest stress and write them here:

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## Coping With Stress

We can’t eliminate or stop stress, but we can manage it. Practicing healthy **lifestyle behaviors** is important to coping with stress. Here are a few examples:

- **Nutrition** – Limit stress-inducing foods, such as caffeine, monosodium glutamate, sugar and saturated fats, and be careful with “comfort foods.”
- **Physical exercise** – Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise three to five times per week, but preferably daily, because it reduces and prevents stress and promotes well-being.
- **Sleep** – Get seven to nine hours of sleep each night to keep yourself in balance.
- **Limit smoking and alcohol** – Feelings of comfort are short-lived. Smoking and drinking can worsen the situation.
- **Financial management** – Worry over money problems can cause issues with sleep, appetite, addictions, etc.



In addition, developing **individual responses** is important for dealing with stress. Review the list of suggestions and see if you find ideas that might work for you:

- Learn relaxation techniques
- Make time for fun
- Laugh
- Share your concerns with others
- Create a quiet scene
- Focus on important relationships
- Seek education, help or counseling for issues that cause the stress



Keep in mind that coping with stress is very personal. Add those ideas that work for you and write them here:

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