

## Stress

Stress is the body's reaction to harmful situations - whether they are real or perceived. When you feel threatened, a chemical reaction occurs in your body that allows you to act in a way to prevent injury.

Stress is our body's response to pressure. When we encounter stress, our body produces stress hormones that trigger a fight or flight response and activate our immune system. This helps us respond quickly to dangerous situations.

Many different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or that threatens our sense of self, or when we feel we have little control over a situation.

Stress means different things to different people. What causes stress in one person may be of little concern to another. Some people are better able to handle stress than others, however, not all stress is bad. In small doses, stress can help you accomplish tasks and prevent you from getting hurt.

We all deal with stress differently. Our ability to cope can depend on our genetics, early life events, personality and social and economic circumstances.

Sometimes, this stress response can be useful: it can help us push through fear or pain so we can run a marathon or deliver a speech, for example. Our stress hormones will usually go back to normal quickly once the stressful event is over, and there will not be any lasting effects. However, too much stress can cause negative effects. It can leave us in a permanent stage of fight or flight, leaving us overwhelmed or unable to cope. Long term, this can affect our physical and mental health.

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Aches and pains
- Chest pain or a feeling like your heart is racing
- Exhaustion or trouble sleeping
- Headaches, dizziness or shaking
- High blood pressure
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching
- Stomach or digestive problems
- Trouble having sex
- Weak immune system

Stress can lead to emotional and mental symptoms like:

- Anxiety or irritability
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Sadness

Some people are more likely to experience stressful situations than others are. For example:

- people with a lot of debt or financial insecurity are more likely to be stressed about money
- people from minority ethnic groups or who are LGBTIQ+ are more likely to be stressed about prejudice or discrimination
- people with disabilities or long-term health conditions are more likely to be stressed about their health or about stigma associated with their condition.

Stress can be a short-term issue or a long-term problem, depending on what changes in your life. Regularly using stress management techniques can help you avoid most physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms of stress.

**Resources:**

*Stress Management Tips*

*Stress Exploration*

*How to manage stress*

*Stress Management worksheet*

*Coping with stress*

*Stress Management Workbook*

Stress

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11874-stress>

How to manage stress

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/causes-of-stress/>