

Stress is a part of everyday life. Feelings of stress can have a positive influence – for example they can motivate you to meet an important deadline or avoid a dangerous situation. However, stress often has the opposite effect, harming our emotional and physical health and limiting our ability to function.

Whether caused by an external trigger (like losing a job) or an internal trigger (like setting unrealistic expectations for yourself), your body and mind must attend to stress in order to return you to balance. This takes your energy away from other, more positive functions like concentrating or taking action. Since we are responsible for bringing about much of our own stress, however, we can also do much to reduce it.

## Common signs of stress

- Feelings of anger
- Tension
- Tight muscles
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Inability to focus

## Self-care strategies for managing stress

Many of the above signs are common to both stress and depression. That means you can use many of the same life changes and self-care strategies to ease the symptoms of depression *and* alleviate stress:

- Exercise regularly to burn off the energy generated by stress.
- Limit or eliminate stimulants like caffeine.
- Pace yourself through the day, and take breaks.
- Practice good sleep habits.

- Recognize the role your thoughts play in causing you stress. Challenge negative messages and unrealistic expectations you may be communicating to yourself. Practice positive self-talk to offset these counterproductive thoughts.
- Learn techniques for “reframing” situations to see their positive aspects.
- Find humor in life. Laughter is a great tension-reducer.
- Seek the support of friends and family.
- Explore different techniques to find those most effective at helping you relax your mind and body, such as abdominal breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, visual imagery, or mindfulness.

**For more information:**

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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