

## Manage Your Stress to Protect Your Health

### WHAT'S AT STAKE?

If you're alive, you have stress. Stress is what motivates us to do the things we need to do to survive. In small doses, it can be very powerful. The problem is that repeated exposure to situations that cause our bodies to produce stress hormones may have negative effects on our mental and physical health.

### WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Chronic stress is linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, adult onset diabetes and depression. Chronic stress may also trigger these health problems in anyone who has a family history of these conditions.

### Example

Some of the symptoms of too much stress include:

- Sleeping difficulties.
- Feelings of anxiety and of being overwhelmed.
- Being short-tempered and uptight.
- Physical sensations such as tense muscles, headache or upset stomach.
- Abuse of substances such as food, cigarettes, alcohol or drugs.

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Managing stress starts with recognizing the signs that you are responding to a stressor—a pounding heart, sweating, feeling flushed and experiencing anger or feeling on edge. Once you notice these symptoms, you can reduce the release of stress hormones by fooling your stress response system. This involves thinking about something positive.

For example, if you get a terse message to be in the boss's office in 10 minutes and feel your heart starting to pound, calm yourself by imagining the look on your child's face when she saw her first birthday cake, or mentally place yourself at a favorite fishing hole. Take some deep breaths as you let the pleasant image wash over you.

Here are some other suggestions to help you better cope with stress:

- Maintain general good health. Eat nutritious meals regularly each day and get adequate sleep and rest. Exercising daily or at least several times a week will also help you to stay strong enough to cope.
- Find someone to talk to. Problems become more manageable when you discuss them with a friend, a member of your family, a clergy person or a counselor. Your company might have an employee assistance officer who can point you in the right direction.
- Learn to relax on your time off from work and other responsibilities, even if it is very short. Every day, do something you enjoy.
- Learn to set realistic goals. If you are working toward specific goals, day-to-day difficulties are easier to handle.
- Laughing is another great way to beat stress. Try to see the funny side of things on the job, on your commute and at home.
- Get outdoors every day. It's easy for many of us to go from home to work and never leave the shelter of a building or vehicle. Get in touch with the real world by stepping outside and experiencing the weather. It's a good way to change your daily perspective.

### FINAL WORD

*A reasonable amount of stress can motivate us to work better and faster. But excessive stress can cause many problems, including health difficulties. It can also keep us from concentrating on working safely. Learn how to reduce the stress in your life, and how to manage the stress that can't be eliminated.*





