



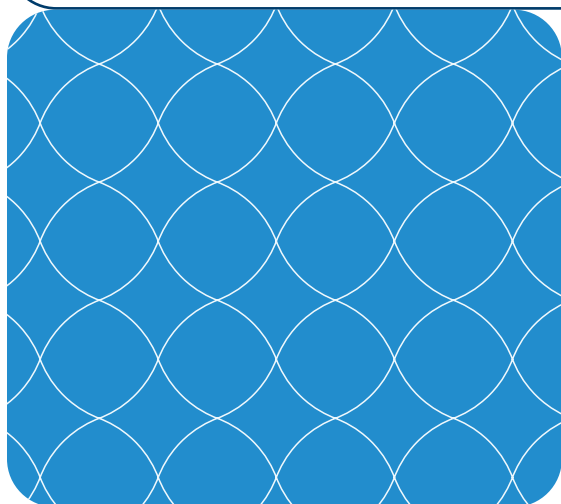
Stress

Visit Eleven

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Content for this guide was adapted from information provided by Healthwise by WebMD Ignite.

Stress and Weight

Stress can affect your weight. Some stress chemicals make you feel tense, while others make you feel good.

Feel-Good Chemicals

These chemicals can make you feel good, calm, and happy:

- Dopamine – Helps you feel pleasure and motivation.
- Endorphins – Lower pain and boost happiness, especially after physical activity.
- Norepinephrine – Gives you energy and focus.
- Serotonin – Helps you feel relaxed and be in a good mood.

Stress Chemicals

These chemicals can make you feel stressed and anxious:

- Adrenaline (also called Epinephrine) – Raises your heart rate and energy when you are stressed.
- Cortisol – Helps your body handle stress, but too much can lead to weight gain.

Foods

Eating healthy foods can help balance stress chemicals like cortisol. Too much cortisol can make your body store extra weight.



Choosing foods like **protein, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and water** can help your body stay strong and keep a healthy weight.



Lowering amounts of **sugar, starch, caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol** can help balance the stress chemicals in your body.

Stress Eating

When we feel stressed, we may want salty or sweet foods. This is called stress eating.

“Stressed” spelled backwards is “desserts.” This shows how stress and food can be linked.

STRESSED|DESSERTS

It is okay to enjoy sweets every now and then. But finding other ways to handle stress can help you feel better and reach your goals.

Activity

Boosting endorphins can help lower stress.

Way to boost endorphins:

Scan to learn more:

Physical activity and exercise

<https://www.healthwise.net/wellspan/Content/StdDocument.aspx?DOCHWID=center1016>



Deep breathing

<https://www.healthwise.net/wellspan/Content/StdDocument.aspx?DOCHWID=uz2255>



Meditation

<https://www.healthwise.net/wellspan/Content/StdDocument.aspx?DOCHWID=uz2240>



Positive imagery

<https://www.healthwise.net/wellspan/Content/StdDocument.aspx?DOCHWID=ta5531>



Making these activities part of your daily routine can help balance stress and improve your overall well-being.

Visit our online Health Library to learn more activities that can help manage stress.

<https://www.healthwise.net/wellspan>



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Behaviors

These behaviors help lower stress by boosting feel-good chemicals like serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins. They also lower stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. Here's how:

- **Cry** – helps lower built-up stress and lowers tension.
- **Dance** – Raises endorphins which lowers stress and gives you more energy.
- **Hug** – Releases oxytocin (“the love hormone”) which lowers cortisol.
- **Hum** – Creates vibrations that calm the nervous system and lower stress.
- **Laugh** – Lowers cortisol and raises dopamine, making you feel happier.
- **Play** – Helps you relax and boosts feel-good chemicals.
- **Skip** – Combines movement and playfulness which raises endorphins.
- **Sing** – Helps you breathe deeply which can lower cortisol and boost dopamine.
- **Smile** – Signals your brain to release serotonin which puts you in a better mood.

Medicines

There are many different types of antidepressants. They may increase the level of certain chemicals in the brain. Some examples of antidepressants that help with stress and mood are:

- **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)**. Some examples of SSRIs are:
 - Citalopram.
 - Fluoxetine.
 - Sertraline.
- **Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)**. Some examples of SNRIs are:
 - Duloxetine.
 - Venlafaxine.

Antidepressants like SSRIs and SNRIs help treat anxiety, depression, and other health issues by balancing brain chemicals. Taking an antidepressant is a personal choice, and using it alongside healthy habits shows strength. Talk to your healthcare provider if you would like to learn more.

Stress Management

Stress is your body's response to a hard situation. Your body can have a physical, emotional, or mental response. Stress is a fact of life for most people, and it affects everyone differently. What causes stress for you may not be stressful for someone else.

A lot of things can cause stress. You may feel stress when you go on a job interview, take a test, or run a race. This kind of short-term stress is normal and even useful. It can help you if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, stress can help you finish an important job on time.

Long-term stress is caused by ongoing stressful situations or events. Examples of long-term stress include long-term health problems, ongoing problems at work, or conflicts in your family. Long-term stress can harm your health.

Measuring Your Stress Level

What causes stress for you may not cause stress for someone else. Only you can figure out whether you have too much stress in your life. Answer these questions to learn more about your stress:

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What job, family, or personal stress do you have?

Stress can be caused by an ongoing personal situation such as caring for a family member.

Have you had any recent major life changes?

Getting married, moving to a new city, or losing a job can all be stressful.

Do your beliefs cause you stress?

Some people feel stress because their beliefs conflict with the way they live their life.

How do you cope with stress?

The ways that you cope with your stress can help you or make stress worse. For example, sleep helps your body recover from the stresses of the day. Not getting enough sleep means you lose the chance to recover from stress.

Relieving Stress

Here are some ways to relieve stress:

- **Be active.**
 - Exercise and physical activity can help reduce stress.
 - Walking is a great way to get started.
- **Do something you enjoy.**
 - These could be a favorite hobby or listening to music.
- **Meditate.**
 - This can help you relax by focusing more on the present moment.
- **Do guided imagery.**
 - Imagine yourself in any setting that helps you feel calm.
 - You can use online videos, books, or a teacher to guide you.
- **Express your feelings.**
 - Talk with supportive friends or family, a counselor, or a faith leader about your feelings.
 - Avoid discussing your feelings with people who make you feel worse.
 - Try writing about how you feel.
 - It may help you to see what's causing stress so you can find ways to cope.

Effects of Stress

When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster, and give you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight stress response. Other symptoms include headache, sweating and sweaty palms, an upset stomach, nausea, and diarrhea. If the stress is over quickly, your body goes back to normal, and no harm is done.

But if stress happens too often or lasts too long, it can have bad effects on both your physical and emotional health.

Physical Effects

Long-term stress can make you more likely to get sick, and it can make symptoms of some diseases worse. Stress can affect your:

- **Immune system.**
 - Constant stress can make you more likely to get sick more often. And if you have a long-term illness, such as heart failure, stress can make your symptoms worse.
- **Heart.**
 - Stress is linked to high blood pressure, abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia), blood clots, and hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). It's also linked to coronary artery disease, heart attack, and heart failure.
- **Muscles.**
 - Constant tension from stress can lead to pain in your neck, shoulders, and low back. Stress may make rheumatoid arthritis worse.
- **Stomach.**
 - If you have stomach problems, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or irritable bowel syndrome, stress can make your symptoms worse.
- **Reproductive system.**
 - Stress is linked to low fertility, erection problems, problems during pregnancy, and painful menstrual periods.

- **Lungs.**
 - Stress can make symptoms of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) worse.
- **Skin.**
 - Skin problems, such as acne and psoriasis, are made worse by stress.

Emotional Effects

Stress also harms your emotional health. You might notice signs of stress in the way you think, act, and feel. You may:

- Feel cranky and unable to deal with even small problems.

- Feel frustrated, lose your temper more often, and yell at others for no reason.
- Feel jumpy or tired all the time.
- Find it hard to focus on tasks.
- Worry too much about small things.
- Feel that you are missing out on things because you can't act quickly.
- Imagine that bad things are happening or are about to happen.
- Feel depressed.

Your relationships may suffer, and you may not do well at work or school.

Avoiding Stress

You might try some of these things to help prevent stress:

- **Manage your time.**
 - This helps you find time to do the things you want and need to do.
- **Get enough sleep.**
 - Your body recovers from the stresses of the day while you are sleeping.
- **Get support.**
 - Your family, friends, and community can make a difference in how you experience stress.
- **Limit your news feed.**
 - Avoid or limit time on social media or news that may make you feel stressed.
- **Do something active.**
 - Exercise or physical activity can help reduce stress.

Responding to Stress in a Healthy Way

Stress is a part of life. But it doesn't have to control your life. Even if sometimes you can't avoid stress, you can build skills to respond to it in a healthy way. Here are a few ideas.

- **Find healthy ways to cope.**
 - Try activities that reduce stress, like meditation, deep breathing, physical

- activity, and making art.
- New behaviors take time to develop. Try doing one thing at a time.
- **Make time for joy.**
 - Take some time to think about the things that are important to you and things you enjoy.
 - These might be safe things that make you feel happy, excited, or energized.
 - Some examples are reading a book, playing with your dog, or seeing friends.
 - You might schedule this ahead of time by putting it on your to-do list or calendar.
- **Unplug from devices.**
 - Think about taking time to do this each day.
 - Try setting limits on when you use devices.
 - For example, try avoiding social media and email before 7:00 a.m. and after 8:00 p.m.
 - Setting your phone to “do not disturb” or using apps that track or block your screen time can help.
 - Make rules that feel right to you.
- **Write it out.**
 - Try writing down thoughts and feelings about a stressful experience.

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- Set aside time each day to write about it.
- Write nonstop and don't screen your thoughts. Give yourself permission to write what comes to mind.
- **Get support.**
 - Everyone needs help sometimes.
 - Ask others how they find support.
 - You might also want to see a counselor who is trained in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).
- The counselor can help you create and use skills to cope with stress.

Change Your Thinking

Changing how you think about and respond to stress can help you feel happier and healthier. So be kind to yourself. Try to see both sides of a situation. Be thankful for people you care about, and accept what isn't perfect in yourself and others.

Time Management

Time management is a way to find the time for all the things you want and need to do. It helps you decide which things are urgent and which can wait. Learning how to manage your time, activities, and commitments can be hard. But doing so can make your life easier, less stressful, and more meaningful.

When you manage your time, you decide which tasks and activities are most important to you. Knowing what's important helps you decide how best to spend your time.

There are three parts to time management:

- Rank tasks by importance.
- Don't put things off until later.
- Manage your commitments.

Rank Tasks by Importance

Time management is a way to schedule the time for all the things you want and need to do. It helps you decide which things are urgent and which can wait.

Here's how to prioritize your tasks.

1. **Make a list of all your tasks and activities for the day or week. Rate these tasks by how important or urgent they are:**
 - **Urgent tasks.**
Urgent tasks are those that must be done right away to avoid a major problem,

such as paying the electric bill today because your electricity will be turned off tomorrow. Many people never deal with important things until they become urgent. This approach always leads to stress.

- **Important tasks.**
These are the tasks that are meaningful or important to you, such as spending time with your family, helping friends, or getting exercise. They are also tasks you must do to avoid a problem, such as paying bills or meeting a deadline at work.
- **Not important tasks.**
These tasks are ones that don't need to be done or that aren't important to you.

2. Look at your rated list, and think about your time.

- If you take care of important tasks in a timely way, you won't have as many urgent tasks to worry about. For example, if you pay your bills when you get them, you won't have to juggle your finances and hurry to pay bills the day they are due.
- Think about how you can redirect your time to activities that are important and meaningful to you. Are you spending a lot of time on things that aren't important or urgent? Maybe there are things that you don't need to do at all.

Don't Put Things Off Until Later

The more stressful or unpleasant a task, the more likely you are to put it off. This only increases your stress. You may want to try these tips for controlling procrastination:

1. Structure your time.

Use a day planner or notebook to plan your day or week. Just seeing on paper that there is a time to get your tasks done can help you get to work. For shorter projects, use a timer or alarm clock to help you stick with your plan. You can also find apps to help structure and plan your time. They can be used on your phone or computer.

2. Break up large tasks.

If you know that you won't be able to focus on a project for 3 hours, break up your work into 1-hour blocks over 3 days. It's easier to face an unpleasant task if the time you are giving it is brief.

3. Create short-term deadlines.

Short-term deadlines will help you make a habit of meeting deadlines. It will also force you to get things done. That way, when the long-term deadline does arrive, you won't have as much pressure and work built up.

4. Avoid trying to make things perfect.

If you demand perfection, you might not even start a task because you're worried it won't be perfect. Doing your best is fine. Giving yourself enough time to do your best will reduce stress.

If you find a tip that works for you, stay with it. Over time you'll gain confidence that you can beat the procrastination habit.

Manage Your Commitments

Having both too many and too few commitments can lead to stress.

1. Look for commitments you can let go.

Letting go of a commitment doesn't mean giving up. It means learning what's important to you, recognizing that you have limits, and



deciding how you want to spend your time. Here are some tips for letting go:

- Don't commit to things that are not important to you.
- When you want or need to let go of something, imagine tying it to a helium balloon, releasing the balloon, and watching it float away.
- Accept that your life is a "work in progress." You don't have to finish every project or meet every goal in your life by tomorrow or even next week. If one of your goals is less important, you can work on it later in your life.

2. Act on your commitments.

Making commitments can be just as hard as letting them go. People who are under stress tend to have too many commitments instead of too few. But sometimes stress comes from a lack of commitment. If you need more commitment in your life, think about what is most important to you. When you are ready to commit:

- Do it. Give yourself to a new commitment as fully as you can.
- Be responsible. Take your commitment seriously. Don't back out of obligations.
- Open up. Be open to new ideas and suggestions, and be ready to learn.

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Daily Planner for Time Management

A planner helps you keep track of your day. This example breaks your time into half-hour blocks. You can change it to match your schedule on the blank planner pages provided in this guidebook.

Time	Activity	Time	Activity
7 - 7:30 a.m.	Wake up, get ready	3 - 3:30 p.m.	Take a walk or relax
7:30 - 8 a.m.	Eat breakfast	3:30 - 4 p.m.	Finish up tasks
8 - 8:30 a.m.	Plan my day	4 - 4:30 p.m.	Review what I did today
8:30 - 9 a.m.	Start work or chores	4:30 - 5 p.m.	Wind down, relax
9 - 9:30 a.m.	Focused work time	5 - 5:30 p.m.	Make dinner
9:30 - 10 a.m.	Short break	5:30 - 6 p.m.	Eat dinner
10 - 10:30 a.m.	Continue work or tasks	6 - 6:30 p.m.	Spend time with family or friends
10:30 - 11 a.m.	Check emails or messages	6:30 - 7 p.m.	Do a hobby or fun activity
11 - 11:30 a.m.	Work or study session	7 - 7:30 p.m.	Read or relax
11:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.	Lunch	7:30 - 8 p.m.	Avoid screen time, unwind
12 - 12:30 p.m.	Relax or exercise	8 - 8:30 p.m.	Get ready for bed
12:30 - 1 p.m.	Work or creative time	8:30 - 9 p.m.	Prepare for sleep
1 - 1:30 p.m.	Finish tasks	9 - 9:30 p.m.	Sleep or relax
1:30 - 2 p.m.	Short break or quiet time	9:30 - 10 p.m.	Sleep
2 - 2:30 p.m.	Afternoon work session		
2:30 - 3 p.m.	Talk to coworkers or friends		

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Daily Planner for Time Management

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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Get the emotional health support you want and deserve

At no cost to you



Discover myStrength, a flexible and convenient digital program with proven tools and dedicated support for stress, depression, sleep and more.

myStrength empowers you with:



Personalized plan. Answer a series of questions, and myStrength will create a plan designed just for you.



Recommended digital content and resources. Explore self-guided activities and tools based on your goals and needs.



In-the-moment tools. Calm yourself down, shift your thinking, get inspired and feel more hopeful.



Support your way. Connect with a coach for live sessions and get a personalized plan and digital content.

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