

# Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#59 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

# STRESS

## HOW TO COPE



• Available in Spanish and Chinese: call 311 or visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)  
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)  
• 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址: [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)



## A Little Stress Is Normal

**Stress can be good when it helps you rise to challenges.**

- It can help you face threats and act quickly in an emergency.
- Stress can also sharpen your abilities and help you perform better.

## But Too Much Stress Can Harm You

**Here are some problems that stress can worsen or even cause:**

- Tiredness or exhaustion.
- Poor concentration or memory.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Headache, sweating, nervousness.
- Frequent colds.
- Eating or sleeping problems.
- Abdominal cramps or nausea.
- Mood swings, irritability, impatience, short temper and anger.
- Anxiety, worry, fear and depression.
- High blood pressure, chest pains, heart disease, heart attack, stroke.



**It is normal to feel overly stressed sometimes. No one lives a stress-free life. The challenge is to *manage* stress so it doesn't dominate your life.**

## What Causes Stress?

**Both little things and big things count.**

- **Normal, everyday problems:** commuting delays, computer problems, misplacing things, other people's bad moods.
- **Specific situations:** public speaking, a job interview, a blind date, work deadlines.
- **Significant life events:** marriage, divorce, a new baby, a new job, moving, a serious illness, the death of someone close.
- **Other problems:** family problems, relationship problems; financial worries, trouble on the job.

**People respond differently to stress.**

- A situation that makes YOU anxious may not bother someone else at all. Some people thrive on deadlines, for example. Others are paralyzed by them.
- Something that worries you a lot at first may be much less stressful later. The first day on a new job can be hard. A couple of weeks later, you will probably be much more comfortable.

# 9

# Healthy Ways to

Taking even *one* of these steps can

## 1. Get plenty of sleep.

- Have a regular sleep schedule. When you're rested you have more energy to deal with stressful events.
- If caffeine keeps you awake at night, cut down on coffee, soda and other caffeine-containing drinks.
- Nicotine can also keep you awake. For free help to quit smoking, call 311.

## 2. Be physically active.

- Regular exercise is powerful. It improves mood, relieves stress and makes you healthier. It can even help prevent depression.
- Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as a brisk walk) at least 5 days a week.

## 3. Breathe!

- When people get anxious, they sometimes hold their breath, or breathe fast and shallow.
- Practice deep breathing. Relax your belly and breathe deeply into your abdomen. Inhale and exhale s-l-o-w-l-y.
- Yoga, meditation and other relaxation techniques also relieve stress.

## 4. Talk about it.

- Talk with a trusted friend, family member, or religious advisor.
- Talking puts problems in perspective. Worries decrease, and solutions emerge.
- Spend more time with people who support you, and less time with people who *don't*.

## 5. Write about it.

- Keep a "stress journal" for a week to help you identify your triggers.
- Describe what makes you tense. What happened? How did you feel?
- Look at the events that were most stressful. Pick ONE thing to work on.



# Cope

help you manage stress.

## 6. Treat yourself well.

- When you're overwhelmed, everything feels more difficult. It's harder to be good to yourself. *But now is the time to try.*
- Eat as well as you can. Get to bed on time. Keep your medical appointments. Take your daily medicine.
- Can't do it ALL today? Nobody's perfect. Try again tomorrow.

## 7. Make time for yourself.

- Do something you enjoy *every day*.
- Get somebody to watch the kids for awhile. Go to the movies or take a walk in the park.
- Take short breaks at work. Take a long weekend. Take a real vacation for once.

## 8. Keep it simple.

- Set realistic expectations and goals. Take small, not big, steps. (Reorganize a drawer, not the whole house.)
- Try to change the way you see things:
  - Don't mistake temporary problems ("*I'm tired today*") for permanent ones ("*I'm too old to change*").
  - Don't mistake specific problems ("*I have a bad habit*") for general ones ("*I'm a bad person*").

## 9. Laugh it off.

- Laughter has stress-relieving benefits – and it's FREE.
- Humor helps us see problems as "challenges" instead of "threats." It connects us with others, and it's *contagious*.
- Get more laughter in your life:
  - Rent a hilarious movie.
  - Play with your pet.
  - Get really silly with the kids.



# Help Is Available

**Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if stress is too much for you to handle.**

- Mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder can be brought on or worsened by stress.
- Counseling can help you manage stress and find ways to relax.
- Participating in support groups with people who share a certain type of stress, such as the death of a loved one, can help you feel much better.
- A health care provider can help identify and prescribe treatment, such as psychological counseling or medication, for these conditions.

## More Information and Help

- **NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**  
**Health Bulletin:** [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) or call 311
  - #45: Depression: It's Treatable
  - #48: Alcohol: How Much Is Too Much?
  - #53: Healthy Parenting
- **LifeNet**  
(24-hour confidential crisis counseling and mental health referral):  
1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543-3638) TTY: 212-982-5284
- **Spanish LifeNet:**  
1-877-AYUDESE (1-877-298-3373)
- **Asian LifeNet (Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean):**  
1-877-990-8585
- **American Psychological Association:**  
[www.apa.org/topics/topicstress.html](http://www.apa.org/topics/topicstress.html)
- **American Academy of Family Physicians:**  
[www.familydoctor.org/167.xml](http://www.familydoctor.org/167.xml)

**DIAL  
311**

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