

STRESS

How It Affects YOUR Blood Pressure

Reducing stress can help lower high blood pressure. Stress is a normal part of life. But too much stress can lead to emotional, psychological, and even physical problems — including heart disease, high blood pressure, chest pains, or irregular heartbeats. Medical researchers are not sure exactly how stress increases the risk of heart disease. Stress itself might be a risk factor, or it could be that high levels of stress make other risk factors (such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure) worse.

Your Body's Response to Stress

Stress is frequently defined as a fight-or-flight response- a moment when your body produces stress hormones in preparation for fighting your stress or running away from it. This response was useful thousands of years ago when people were facing a wild animal or another threat. Today your body responds to stress and perceived danger in the same way. However, realistic modern threats are losing your job, financial difficulties, being stuck in traffic, public speaking etc. When your body is under stress it responds by producing a surge of stress hormones; causing a temporary increase in your blood pressure and causing your heart to beat faster and your blood vessels to narrow.

Warning Signs of Stress

When your body is exposed to long periods of stress it gives you warning signs that something is wrong. These warning signs should not be ignored, they are telling you that you need to slow down and give your body a break.

Below are some common warning signs of stress:

- **Physical signs:** Dizziness, general headaches and pains, grinding teeth, clenched jaw, indigestion, difficulty sleeping, ringing in the ears, stooped posture, sweaty palms, tiredness, weight gain or loss, and upset stomach to name a few.
- **Mental signs:** Constant worry, difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, lack of creativity, loss of sense of humor, and inability to concentrate.
- **Emotional signs:** Anger, anxiety, crying, depression, frequent mood swings, irritability, loneliness, negative thinking, nervousness, and sadness.
- **Behavioral signs:** Bossiness, compulsive eating, critical attitude of others, explosive actions, frequent job changes, impulsive actions, increased use of alcohol or drugs, withdrawal from relationships or social situations.

For more information, contact:

Julie Chobdee, MPH, Wellness Program Coordinator at Julie.Chobdee@ucr.edu or x2-1488.

How to Cope with Stress

While reducing stress might not directly lower blood pressure over the long term using strategies to manage your stress can improve your health in other ways. Mastering stress management techniques can lead to other behavior changes – including those that reduce your blood pressure.

Below are some effective ways to cope with stress:

- **Eat and drink sensibly:** Abusing alcohol and food may seem to reduce stress, but it actually adds to it.
- **Assert yourself:** It is OKAY to say “no,” you do not have to meet others’ expectations on demand.
- **Stop smoking:** Aside from obvious other health risks, nicotine acts as a stimulant and brings on more stress symptoms.
- **Exercise regularly:** Aerobic exercise has been shown to release endorphins- natural substances that help you feel better and maintain a positive attitude.
- **Relax daily:** Find something that helps you relax. Whether it is yoga, Pilates, listening to relaxing music, reading, meditating, etc. find something that works for YOU!
- **Get enough sleep:** even with proper diet and exercise you can’t fight stress without rest, you need time to recover.
- **Simplify your schedule:** If you constantly feel rushed, take a few minutes to review your calendar and make a to-do-list. Prioritize the activities that are most important to you and schedule less time for those with the least importance or eliminate them completely.

Additional resources

Mayo Clinic

- Take a [Stress Assessment](#).
- [Win Control](#) over the stress in your life.
- Effective [Solutions For Your Stressors](#).
- Stress Relief: [Learn How To Say No](#).

WebMD

- Check out WebMD for [Ways To Relieve Stress](#).