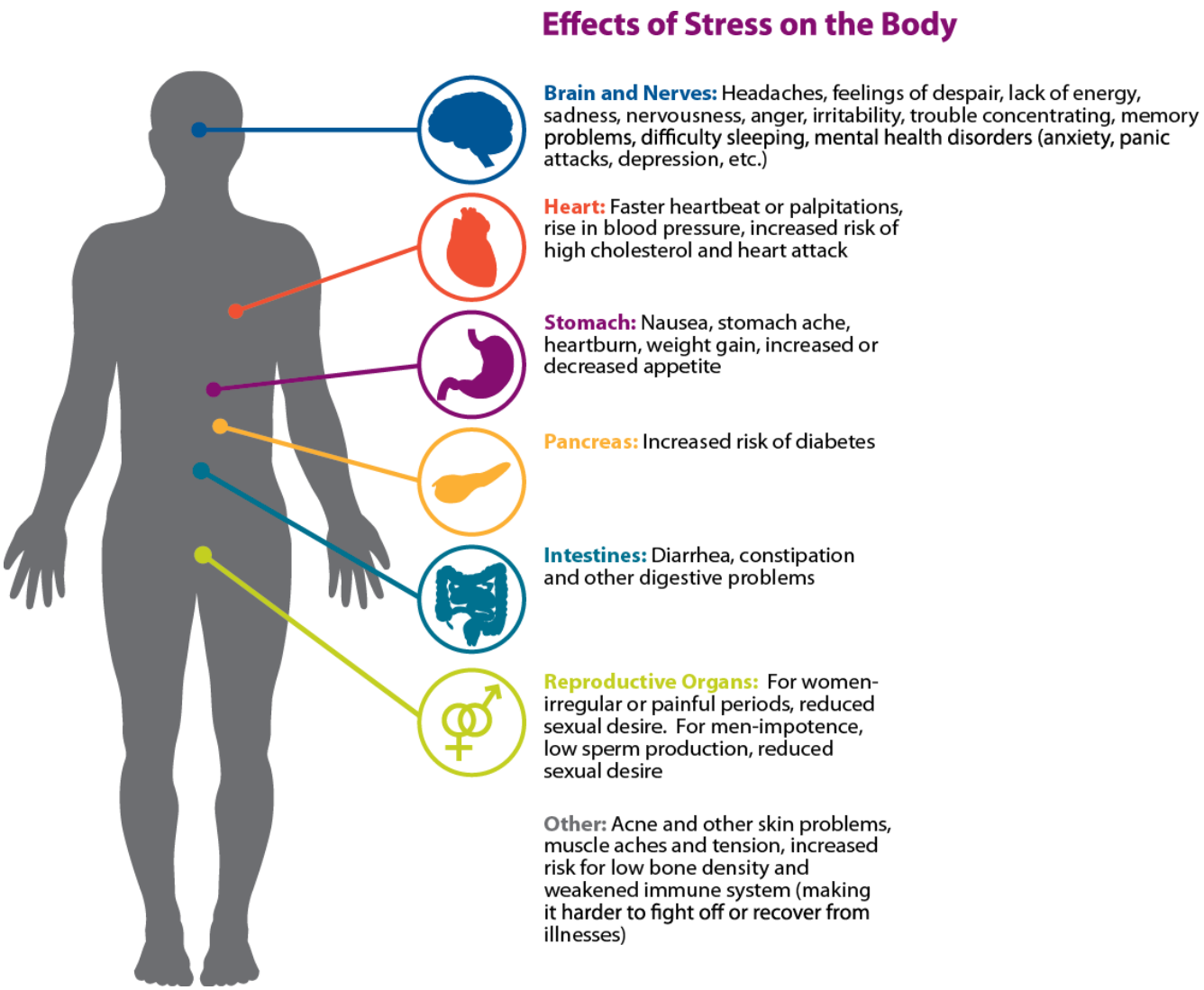
Mental Health America

Stress: Coping with Everyday Problems

Everyone has stress. It is a normal part of life. You can feel stress in your body when you have too much to do or when you haven't slept well. You can also feel stress when you worry about things like your job, money, relationships, or a friend or family member who is ill or in crisis. In response to these strains your body automatically increases blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, metabolism, and blood flow to you muscles. This response is intended to help your body react quickly and effectively to a high-pressure situation. However, when you are constantly reacting to stressful situations without making adjustments to counter the effects, you will feel stress which can threaten your health and well-being.



According to the APA's Stress in America study, nearly 70% of Americans experience physical and mental symptoms of stress, but only 37% think they are doing very well at managing stress.

Tips for Reducing or Controlling Stress

If you are feeling stressed, there are steps you can take to feel better. As you read the following suggestions, remember that conquering stress will not come from a half-hearted effort, nor will it come overnight. It will take determination, persistence and time. Some suggestions may help immediately, but if your stress level doesn't seem to improve, it may require more attention and/or lifestyle changes.

Be realistic. If you feel overwhelmed by some activities (yours and/or your family's), learn to say NO! Eliminate an activity that is not absolutely necessary. You may be taking on more responsibility than you can or should handle. If you meet resistance, give reasons why you're making the changes. Be willing to listen to other's suggestions and be ready to compromise.

Shed the "superman/superwoman" urge. No one is perfect, so don't expect perfection from yourself or others. Ask yourself, "What really needs to be done?" How much can I do? Is the deadline realistic? What adjustments can I make?" Don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it.

Meditate. Just ten to twenty minutes of quiet reflection may bring relief from chronic stress as well as increase your tolerance to it. Use the time to listen to music, relax and try to think of pleasant things or nothing.

Visualize. Use your imagination and picture how you can manage a stressful situation more successfully. Whether it's a business presentation or moving to a new place, many people feel visual rehearsals boost self-confidence and enable them to take a more positive approach to a difficult task.

Take one thing at a time. For people under tension or stress, their day-to-day workload can sometimes seem unbearable. The best way to cope with this feeling of being overwhelmed is to take one task at a time. Make a list of things you need to get done and start with one task. Once you accomplish that task, choose the next one. The positive feeling of "checking off" tasks is very satisfying. It will motivate you to keep going.

Exercise. Regular exercise is a popular way to relieve stress. Twenty to thirty minutes of physical activity benefits both the body and the mind.

Hobbies. Take a break from your worries by doing something you enjoy. Whether it's gardening or painting, schedule time to indulge your interest.

Share your feelings. A conversation with a friend lets you know that you are not the only one having a bad day, caring for a sick child or working in a busy office. Stay in touch with friends and family. Ask them how they have dealt with a similar situation that may be "stressing you out." Let them provide love, support and guidance. Don't try to cope alone.

Be flexible! If you find you're meeting constant opposition in either your personal or professional life, rethink your position or strategy. Arguing only intensifies stressful feelings. Make allowances for other's opinions and be prepared to compromise. If you are willing to be accommodating, others may meet you halfway. Not only will you reduce your stress, you may find better solutions to your problems.

Go easy with criticism. You may expect too much of yourself and others. Try not to feel frustrated, disappointed or even "trapped" when another person does not measure up. The "other person" may be a coworker, spouse, or child whose behavior you are trying to change or don't agree with. Avoid criticisms about character, such as "You're so stubborn," and try providing constructive suggestions for how someone might do something differently.

Where to Get Help

If you think that you or someone you know may be under more stress than just dealing with a passing difficulty, it may be helpful to talk with your doctor, clergy person, or employee assistance professional. They may suggest you visit with a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or other qualified counselor.

In crisis? If you or someone you know is in crisis, seek help immediately. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a 24-hour crisis center or dial 911 for immediate assistance.

Ideas to consider when talking with a professional

- List the things which cause stress and tension in your life.
- How does this stress and tension affect you, your family and your job?
- Can you identify the stress and tensions in your life as short or long term?
- Do you have a support system of friends/family that will help you make positive changes?
- What are your biggest obstacles to reducing stress?
- What are you willing to change or give up for a less stressful and tension-filled life?
- What have you tried already that didn't work for you?

America.