

# HOW DOES STRESS IMPACT YOUR HEALTH?



**E**veryone experiences stress to some degree. The way you respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to your overall well-being.

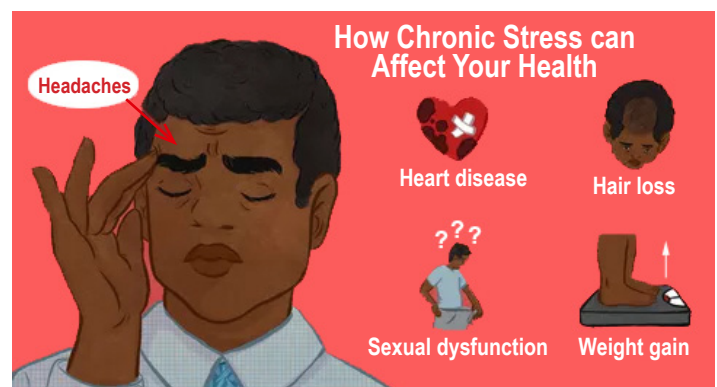
Sometimes, the best way to manage your stress involves changing your situation. At other times, the best way involves changing the way you respond to the situation.

Developing a clear understanding of how stress impacts your physical and mental health is important. It's also important to recognize how your mental and physical health affects your stress level.

## Types of Stress

Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological strain. However, not all types of stress are harmful or even negative. Here are the different types of stress:

- **Eustress:** This type of stress is fun and exciting. It's known as a positive type of stress that can keep you energized. It is associated with some surges of adrenaline, such as when you are skiing or racing to meet a deadline.





- **Acute stress:** A very short-term type of stress that can either be positive or more distressing. This is the type of stress we most often encounter in day-to-day life.
- **Episodic acute stress:** Acute stress that seems to run rampant and be a way of life, creating a life of relative chaos.
- **Chronic stress:** Stress that seems never-ending and inescapable, like the stress of a bad marriage or an extremely taxing job. Chronic stress can also stem from traumatic experiences and childhood trauma.

## How Your Body Responds

Stress can trigger the body's response to a perceived threat or danger, known as the **fight-or-flight** response. During this reaction, certain hormones like adrenaline and cortisol are released. This speeds the heart rate, slows digestion, shunts blood flow to major muscle groups, and changes various other autonomic nervous functions, giving the body a burst of energy and strength. Originally named for its ability to enable us to physically fight or run away when faced with danger, it's now activated in situations where neither response is appropriate—like in traffic or during a stressful day at work.

When the perceived threat is gone, systems are designed to return to normal function via the **relaxation response**. But in cases of chronic stress, the relaxation responses doesn't occur often enough, and being in a near-constant state of fight-or-flight can cause damage to the body.

Stress can also lead to some unhealthy habits that have a negative impact on your health. For example, many people cope with stress by eating too much or by smoking. These unhealthy habits damage the body and create bigger problems in the long-term.

## The Impact on Your Health

The connection between your mind and body is apparent when you examine the impact stress has on your life. Feeling stressed out over a relationship, money, or your living situation can create physical health issues.

The inverse is also true. Health problems, whether you're dealing with high blood pressure or you have diabetes, will also affect your stress level and your mental health.

When your brain experiences high degrees of stress, your body reacts accordingly.

Serious acute stress, like being involved in a natural disaster or getting into a verbal altercation, can trigger heart attacks, arrhythmias, and even sudden death. However, this happens mostly in individuals who already have heart disease.

Chronic stress can have a serious impact on your health as well. If you experience chronic stress your **autonomic nervous system** will be overactive, which is likely to damage your body.

The first symptoms can be relatively mild, like chronic headaches and increased susceptibility to colds. With more exposure to chronic stress, however, more serious health problems may develop. They include, but are not limited to:

## Stress-Influenced Conditions

- Diabetes
- Hair loss
- Heart disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Obesity
- Sexual dysfunction
- Tooth and gum disease
- Ulcers



Stress also takes an emotional toll. While some stress may produce feelings of mild anxiety and frustration, prolonged stress can lead to **burnout**, **depression** and **anxiety disorders**.

## Learning to Manage Stress

Although stress is inevitable, it can be manageable. When you understand the toll it takes on you and the steps to combat stress, you can take charge of your health and reduce the impact stress has on your life.

The following articles in this journey will help you identify how stress affects you. It will also assist you in identifying the best stress reduction strategies that will work for you and it will assist in preventing burnout. Here's a glimpse of what you'll learn:

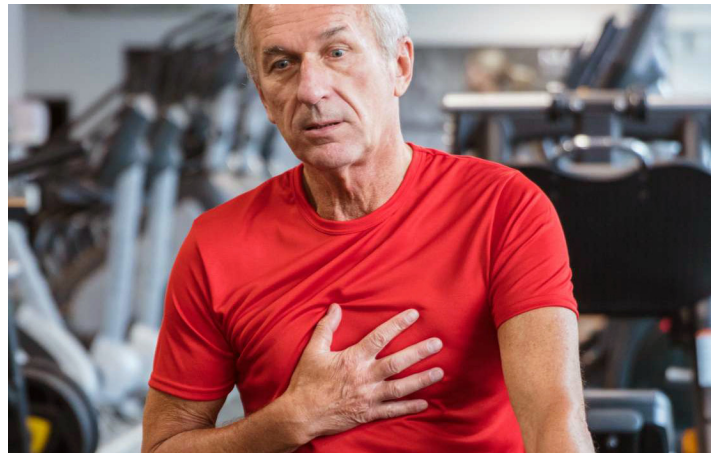


### Recognize the Signs of Burnout

High levels of stress may place you at a high risk of burnout. Burnout can leave you feeling exhausted and apathetic about your job. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to prevent and address burnout if you recognize the symptoms.

### How Stress Impacts Weight

Stress can **create weight fluctuations in a variety of ways**. Sometimes it impacts appetite. At other times, it can affect metabolism and hormones to the point that it becomes too difficult to manage your weight, no matter your diet.



### How Exercise Reduces Stress

Physical activity has a **big impact on your brain and your body**. Whether you enjoy Tai Chi or you want to begin jogging, exercise reduces stress and improves many symptoms associated with mental illness.

### Effective Ways to Manage Stress

Although there's a lot of talk about the importance of managing stress, most people aren't exactly sure how to do it. It's important to have a **toolbox filled with stress reduction tools** that help you combat stress effectively.

### Establish a Self-Care Routine

Incorporating **regular self-care activities into your daily life** is essential to stress management. Learn how to take care of your mind, body, and spirit and discover how to equip yourself to live your best life.

### Live a More Mindful Life

Mindfulness isn't just something you practice for 10 minutes each day. It can also be a way of life. Discover **how to live more mindfully throughout your day** so you can become more awake and conscious throughout your life.

