



## Stress

### What is Stress?

Stress is your body's reaction to an event or situation (real or imagined). Stress is not so much what happens to you, but how you respond to a situation or event. Too much stress is hard on your mind, body, and especially your heart.



While stress is a part of everyday life, too much stress increases a person's chances of getting or worsening heart disease. High levels of stress or stress over long periods can cause:

- Increased blood pressure
- Increased higher cholesterol
- Increased chances of having a heart attack or stroke

### What are Stressors?

A stressor is any situation or event that triggers your body's stress response. Stressors are different for each person.

Examples of stressors:

- Having a new diagnosis of heart failure
- Limits in physical ability
- Having chronic pain
- Dealing with a number of health conditions
- Conflict in a relationship
- Being isolated from friends and family
- Dealing with the death or illness of a loved one
- Changes at work
- Money worries

### How do you know if you are stressed?

Ask yourself the following question (Choose the number that most reflects your feeling over the last two weeks.)

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Over the last two weeks, how much have I been bothered by feeling stressed?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
(None) (A little) (Moderate) (Severe)

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#### If you scored 4 or lower

- You are probably coping pretty well with your stress. If you feel you would like more help than this sheet gives you, please talk to someone you trust.

#### If you scored between 5 and 8

- It would be good for you to talk to your health care provider or a mental health professional about how you are feeling.

#### If you scored 8 or higher

- You are very stressed and need to get help right away.

Sometimes when people feel very stressed and overwhelmed, they start to think about hurting themselves. If you have started to make a plan to hurt yourself, go to the nearest emergency room right away.

**Support for those in crisis**  
Crisis Line Association of BC  
1-800-784-2433  
1-800-SUICIDE

## What might happen if you have too much stress

### How stress can affect your thinking

- Trouble concentrating, short attention span, easily distracted
- Poor judgement
- Lapse in memory
- Difficulty making simple decisions
- Brooding over problems
- Imagining the worst
- Confusion

### How stress can affect your behaviour

- Crying
- Fidgeting, and pacing
- Having more arguments
- Drinking more coffee, tea, cola
- Withdrawing from others
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Sexual difficulties

### How stress can affect your emotions

- Feeling helpless and frustrated
- Feeling overwhelmed by your life
- Feeling anxious, or worried
- Feeling irritable, hostile, or angry
- Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless

### How stress can affect your body

- Headache
- Knots in your stomach, feeling sick to your stomach
- Restlessness
- Sweating
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Muscle tension in jaw, neck, or shoulders
- Tremors in hands or legs
- Tingling or numbness in fingertips
- Trouble sleeping, feeling tired all the time

## Some ideas on how to manage your stress

(You can find detailed help on how to make these changes in the resources listed at the bottom of this page.)

- ✓ Practice deep breathing and other forms of relaxation such as:
  - Meditation, yoga, and stretching
- ✓ Call a friend.
- ✓ Maintain healthy habits such as:
  - Exercising daily to get rid of tension.
  - Eating a healthy diet to nourish your body.
  - Getting a full night's sleep.
- ✓ Limit what you take on. It is okay to say 'no'.
- ✓ Be assertive.
- ✓ Make small changes to organize your life.
- ✓ Use a calendar and a 'to do' list to help you manage your time.
- ✓ Look for the good in self or others.
- ✓ When a worry enters your mind, ask yourself if it is a problem you can solve.  
If the answer is yes, set aside some time to problem solve.  
If the answer is no, let the worry go!
- ✓ Have as much fun as possible! You deserve it!

**CAUTION: Alcohol, tobacco, or street drugs should not be used to manage your stress**

### For more information on Stress, check these resources:

Bounce Back Program: [www.cmha.bc.ca/how-we-can-help/adults/bounceback](http://www.cmha.bc.ca/how-we-can-help/adults/bounceback)

Positive Coping with Health Conditions - A Self-Care Workbook

[www.comh.ca/publications/resources/pub\\_pchc/PCHC%20Workbook.pdf](http://www.comh.ca/publications/resources/pub_pchc/PCHC%20Workbook.pdf)

HealthLink BC [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca)

Managing Stress Workbook, Happy Hearts Community Wellness Program, St Paul's

Hospital: <http://www.heartcentre.ca/documents/12Module-ManagingStressMar28-12.pdf>