

Stress is a natural part of life. However, too much stress can harm our health, especially if it continues day after day, month after month. This is chronic stress and can put you at risk for health problems like heart disease and depression.

## Types of Stress

There are two types of stress—emotional and physical.

Examples of emotional stress are relationship problems, pressure at work, financial worries, experiencing discrimination or having a major life change.

Examples of physical stress include being sick, having pain, not sleeping well, recovering from an injury or surgery, or having an alcohol or drug use disorder.

## Coping Skills for Stress Management

Try these habits to better manage stress and improve your mood.

- **Take time to do things that make you relaxed and feel good.** Even if it is only a 10-minute break in a long day. Listen to music, read, go for a walk in nature, do a hobby, take a bath, or spend time with a friend.
- **Exercise regularly.** Any kind of exercise can lower stress and improve your mood. Try swimming, walking or yoga. Pick activities that you enjoy and make it a regular habit.
- **Eat and drink well.** Eat well-balanced meals with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Try not to “stress eat” unhealthy or large amounts of food. Cut back caffeine and alcohol. Herbal tea can help you relax in times of stress.
- **Connect with people you enjoy.** Go out for coffee with a friend, chat with a neighbor, call a family member, and visit a clergy member or spiritual leader.
- **Sleep well.** Try to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Make a regular bedtime schedule. Keep your room dark and cool. Try to avoid computers, TV, cell phones and tablets before bed.
- **Plan ahead.** Make a to-do list and break down big projects into small steps. Try to be one step ahead so you do not feel rushed.
- **Try positive thinking.** Go easy on yourself and address problems in a hopeful way. Instead of thinking the worst, focus on the good. For example, instead of thinking “I’ll never be able to do this,” try to think, “I’ll give it another go and do the best I can.”



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Resources

If stress is getting in the way of your daily life, talk to your healthcare team. You may want to seek counseling from a mental health professional for more support.

To watch a video on stress reduction, go to [bit.ly/Stress-Less-Cynthia](https://bit.ly/Stress-Less-Cynthia).

You may find resources in your area by going to [sutterhealth.org/classes-events](https://sutterhealth.org/classes-events) and selecting the topics “Mind Body” or “Mental Health.”

## Coping Skills for Stress Management (Continued)

- **Try a daily practice of gratitude and joy.** Take 5 minutes to focus on things in your life that bring you joy. Make a list of things you are grateful for, write a thank you note or pray for your good blessings.
- **Try meditation and mindfulness.** These practices combine breathing with focused thought on something such as an image, phrase or sound. You can meditate while sitting still, or while doing an activity such as yoga or tai chi. You might want to try a meditation phone app to guide you.

### Here are a few examples of meditation and mindfulness you can use daily:

#### Deep Breathing

Slow, calm and deep breathing can help you relax. Try these steps to focus on your breathing and repeat as needed.

1. Find a comfortable position and close your eyes.
2. Exhale and drop your shoulders.
3. Breathe in through your nose; fill your lungs and then your belly. Think of relaxing your body, quieting your mind, and becoming calm and peaceful.
4. Breathe out slowly through your nose, relaxing your belly. Think of releasing tension, pain, worries or distress.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 until you feel relaxed.

#### Imagery

Imagery is using your mind to excite the senses—sound, vision, smell, taste and feeling. This can ease your stress.

1. Begin by getting comfortable, and then do some slow breathing.
2. Imagine a place you love being. It could be somewhere from your childhood, somewhere you vacationed or just a place you imagine.
3. Feel how it is to be in the place you imagined. Notice the sounds, air, colors and who is there with you. This is a place you feel cared for and loved. All is well. You are safe.
4. Take in all the smells, sounds, tastes and feelings. As you do, feel your body being nourished and healed. Feel the calm that surrounds you.
5. Breathe in all the good.
6. Breathe out any discomfort or tension.

