



# Stress Management

## My Educators

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## Welcome

Thank you for attending this health education class. As a group, our goal is to help you build knowledge and skills needed to potentially improve your health.

The facilitator will:

- Provide scientific evidence-based information
- Create a safe environment appropriate for a healthy exchange of information
- Respect each individual and demonstrate courtesy and understanding
- Respect the group dynamic
- Manage time appropriately
- Guide the discussion and manage the classroom in a manner that allows for optimal learning and engagement
- Make him/herself available for questions after the class

Participants are expected to:

- Respect the rights, privacy, and property of other participants and uc davis personnel
- Respect individuals' opinions
- Reserve judgement of others
- Actively participate as appropriate
- Express themselves with courtesy, dignity, and sensitivity
- Keep education commitments and arrive for classes in a timely manner
- Follow UC Davis Health rules and regulations for patient care and conduct, including smoking, cell phone and electrically powered equipment regulations, and the visitor policy

# Stress Management

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Unless otherwise noted, the recommendations  
in this book reflect recommendations from the American  
Psychological Association, National Institute of Health, and  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



## Introduction

Stress is a part of everyday life. While it may be unavoidable, it is manageable. This class will help you understand the different types of stress, identify sources of stress, offer guidance on how to minimize stress, and provide tools, activities, and resources for managing stress.

### Why Does Managing Stress Matter?

Stress can affect many parts of the body and overall health. It can lead to high blood pressure, chronic headaches, and heart disease among other conditions. In addition, stress can cause an increase in tobacco and alcohol use, overeating or undereating, stomach problems, and difficulty sleeping.

What do you do now to manage your stress?

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## Types of Stress

### Acute Stress

Acute stress is stress that is felt for a short period of time. It can be positive (eustress) or negative (distress). It usually resolves quickly. Triggers of acute stress may involve events that are unpredictable or leave a feeling of having little or no control.

Examples of causes of acute stress:

- Car breaks down
- A deadline at work
- Taking a big test
- Planning a special event like a wedding

### Chronic Stress

Chronic stress happens over a long period of time. It may result from a difficult situation that lasts a long time or repeated thoughts about an event. Chronic stress can impact physical and mental health.

Examples of causes of chronic stress:

- Caregiving for a chronically ill family member
- Ongoing debt or inability to pay bills
- High-pressure jobs with long hours

*There are many different types of stress*



# Stress Management Action Plan

List your top three stressors in the first column. We will come back to this plan throughout the class to complete the other sections.

Stress Management Action Plan		
Your top 3 stressors	What happens to you?	What action are you going to take?
Example: Arguments with my son	Example: My neck and shoulders feel tense, my heart races	Example: Pause and take deep breaths when we begin to argue. Go on a walk and return to the conversation later



# The Body's Response to Stress

Our bodies are trained to respond to stress by releasing the hormones epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol. This is referred to as the “fight or flight” response. Our ancestors may have had stress that resulted in a need for quick movement (imagine being chased by a tiger!). Now, when our body senses stress, it continues to release these same hormones that would prepare us to fight that tiger or run away from it. Below is a list of changes that happen in the body as a result of the “fight or flight” response:

- Heart beats faster
- Blood pressure increases
- The amount of sugar in the blood increases
- Faster breathing
- Muscles tense
- Blood clots more quickly
- It becomes harder to digest food because blood is flowing away from the gut to the arms and legs

## Impact of Stress on the Body

### Emotional Effects

- Feeling anxious or nervous
- Becoming angry or frustrated easily
- Fear, worry
- Moodiness
- Becoming forgetful

### Effect on Muscles

- Back pain
- Jaw pain

### Digestion Problems

- Heartburn
- Ulcers
- Gas
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

### Other Problems

- Sleep difficulty
- Headaches, migraines
- Decreased sexual function



# The Body's Response to Stress

Some health problems may become worse or harder to manage

- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Inflammatory bowel disease (colitis, Crohn's)
- Asthma
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure or heart disease

## Changes in health behaviors

- Start using or increased use of tobacco products
- Use of caffeine, alcohol, or other substances
- Less physical activity
- Changes in appetite or energy levels
- Not going to regular health appointments, tests, screenings, or vaccinations

*Take a moment to list the changes that happen to you in your body when you experience stress in your Stress Management Action Plan on page 6*



# Stress Management Techniques

There are many tools to help combat the negative effects of stress in healthy ways. Taking small steps for your physical and mental health can have a big impact. You can find and manage what causes your stress and the right combination of techniques that work for you.

## Physical Activity

Stress can lead to muscle tension, tightness, and soreness in the neck, shoulders, chest, and back. Physical activity may help you reduce and manage stress.

### Tips for Physical Activity

- Warm up before being active
- Start small and build up to 150 minutes per week
  - You can break this up into 20-30 minutes each day
- Exercising in nature can improve mood
- Listen to your body - if you feel pain, stop
- Remember to breathe!

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

A method to help reduce anxiety and muscle tension

1. Start in a comfortable position and choose a muscle group like your leg muscles
2. Inhale and contract the muscles for five to 10 seconds
3. Exhale and release the muscles quickly
4. Relax for 10 seconds and move on to the next muscle group







## Sleep

Adults need 7 or more hours of sleep each night.

Not getting enough sleep can affect your brain function and your mood. Here are some tips to get well-rested sleep:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- Create a nighttime ritual that helps you wind down before bed
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol late in the evening
- Limit screen time from phones, tablets, or TV
  - Blue light can lower your body's ability to make sleep hormones
- Be active during the day



*Today and every day, strive to balance physical activity with a healthy eating pattern and consistent sleep routine to take care of your body*

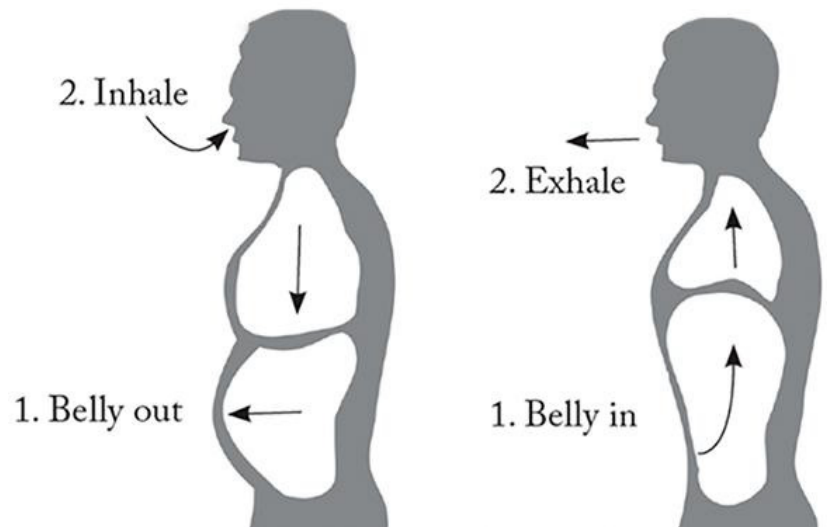


## Deep Breathing

Deep breathing helps to lower the fight or flight response by increasing oxygen to the muscles and triggering the body's relaxation response.

### Practice: Belly Breathing

1. While sitting, bring your hands down in a relaxed position
2. As you inhale, count to three and imagine your belly rising and inflating like a balloon
3. As you exhale, slowly count to six pulling your belly button in and imagine the balloon deflating
4. Continue for six deep breaths



## Take a Pause

When the brain is charged up emotionally, it can take several seconds to calm down. Taking a pause helps our brain to think more clearly, allowing us to reduce anger and anxiety, communicate more clearly, and manage our emotions.

Good times to practice:

- Before a test
- Working through a conflict
- When you feel you're about to lose your temper





## Mindfulness and Visualization

Mindfulness is the practice of bringing attention to the present moment. Mindfulness may be practiced through meditation where you spend time in quiet and focus on the present moment. Other ways to practice mindfulness include:

- Chanting or prayer
- Reading of sacred texts, books, poems, inspirational quotes
- Guided Imagery
  - Follow a script or recording to direct thoughts toward relaxation
  - Use all of your senses in your imagery
  - Practice: Imagine you are in a tropical setting, hearing the sound of the ocean, seeing the blue ocean, feeling the warm sand under your feet, smelling the tropical flowers...



*Meditation can help lower blood pressure, improve heart rate, slow breathing, and relieve tension and tightness in the body*



## Reframe Your Thinking

When facing challenges, look at the big picture. Ask yourself how important a problem will be in the long run. Don't try to control things you have no control over. Many things in life are beyond our control, particularly the behavior of other people. Focus on what you can control, such as the way you react to problems.

Things to practice:

- Set realistic expectations
- Think about and apply your strengths
- Put things into a positive perspective
- If you are spiraling into worst-case scenarios, put your mind elsewhere

## Gratitude

Gratitude is being thankful for things we receive, such as a gift, or things we see, like a flower. We can also feel grateful for things we cannot feel or touch, like health. People who practice gratitude have been shown to be happier and have less stress.

Practice:

- Remember good events, experiences, people, or things in your life and enjoy the good emotions that come with them
- Share gratitude with someone
- Journal or write down things for which you feel grateful

*What are you grateful for?*

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## Self-Care

When life gets overwhelming, many people drop their leisure activities. However, research supports that self-care is important for our well-being. Self-care has been defined as paying attention to your own physical and psychological wellness. What are some things you enjoy doing for yourself?

Examples of self-care behaviors:

*Soak in a warm bath*

*Listen to soothing music*

*Take a walk*

*Get a massage*

*Laugh*

*Be in nature*

*Take a social media break*

*Go to a movie*

*Take a nap*

*Play with pets*

*Watch a funny TV show*

*Play cards, checkers, etc.*

*Call a friend*

*Enjoy a sauna or spa*

*Paint*

*Go on a date*

*Ride a bike*

*Plan a day activity*

*Buy a gift for yourself*

*Read a novel*

*Sing or dance*





## Social Support

Strong social connections can improve how well you respond to stress. Reach out to friends and family who can help you in specific ways. For example, some friends or family may be able to listen and provide sympathy while others may do better at practical tasks like bringing over a meal or helping to babysit.

Talk with people you trust about how you are feeling. Connect with trusted neighbors, coworkers, or members of community-based or faith-based organizations.

Make sure your relationships are balanced. A friend who requires your support but never gives it back may add to your stress levels.



# Consider Your Options

It is not always possible to avoid a problem or escape a stressful situation, but there are actions you can take to prevent or reduce the stress you experience.

## Avoid Stressful Situations

If possible, try not to involve yourself in situations you know may cause you stress. Evaluate whether you can change the situation.

## Problem Solve

Think about the things you can control, avoid, or change. Use tools discussed in this book to try and solve problems that arise.

## Manage Fight or Flight Response

Regulate your response to the problem by using physical techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness. Use the Stress Management Action Plan on page 6 to plan what action you will take to manage your stress.

## Revisit the Situation

Consider coming back to the stressful situation at a later time when your emotions have settled. You may also have more clarity on how you want to handle the situation.



## Seek Additional Help if Needed

If you feel overwhelmed and self-management strategies aren't helping, look for professional help from a psychologist or other mental health provider who can help you learn how to manage your stress. This may be more effective at helping you identify your stressors, develop action plans, change your environment, and modify your response.

*Ask your provider what therapy or counseling services might be available to you*



# Resources



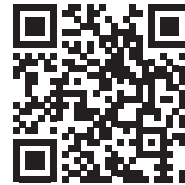
American Psychological Association  
[apa.org/topics/stress/index](https://apa.org/topics/stress/index)



National Institutes of Health  
[NIH.gov](https://NIH.gov)



Centers for Disease Control  
[cdc.gov](https://cdc.gov)



Insight Timer Meditation  
[insighttimer.com](https://insighttimer.com)



UC Davis Health  
Management and Education  
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U.S. Department of Health and  
Human Services - Move Your Way  
[odphp.health.gov/moveyourway](https://odphp.health.gov/moveyourway)



Free Meditation  
[freemeditation.com](https://freemeditation.com)



Do Yoga with Me  
[doyogawithme.com](https://doyogawithme.com)



**Everyone feels stressed from time to time. But what is stress? How does it affect your health? And what can you do about it?**

Stress is how the brain and body respond to any demand. Every type of demand or stressor—such as exercise, work, school, major life changes, or traumatic events—can be stressful.

**Here are five things you should know about stress:**

## 1 Stress affects everyone.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively or recover from stressful events more quickly than others. There are different types of stress—all of which carry physical and mental health risks. A stressor may be a one time or short term occurrence, or it can be an occurrence that keeps happening over a long period of time.

**Examples of stress include:**

- Routine stress related to the pressures of work, school, family, and other daily responsibilities
- Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness
- Traumatic stress experienced in an event like a major accident, war, assault, or a natural disaster where people may be in danger of being seriously hurt or killed. People who experience traumatic stress often experience temporary symptoms of mental illness, but most recover naturally soon after.

## 2 Not all stress is bad.

Stress can motivate people to prepare or perform, like when they need to take a test or interview for a new job. Stress can even be life-saving in some situations. In response to danger, your body prepares to face a threat or flee to safety. In these situations, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival.

### 3 Long-term stress can harm your health.

Health problems can occur if the stress response goes on for too long or becomes chronic, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided. With chronic stress, those same life-saving responses in your body can suppress immune, digestive, sleep, and reproductive systems, which may cause them to stop working normally.

Different people may feel stress in different ways. For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, sadness, anger or irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold.

Routine stress may be the hardest type of stress to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may contribute to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other illnesses, as well as mental disorders like depression or anxiety.





## 4 There are ways to manage stress.

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to manage your stress can reduce or prevent these effects. The following are some tips that may help you to cope with stress:

- **Recognize the Signs** of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- **Talk to Your Doctor or Health Care Provider.** Get proper health care for existing or new health problems.
- **Get Regular Exercise.** Just 30 minutes per day of walking can help boost your mood and reduce stress.
- **Try a Relaxing Activity.** Explore stress coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises. For some stress-related conditions, these approaches are used in addition to other forms of treatment. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy and relaxing activities. Learn more about these techniques on the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) website at ([www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress](http://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress)).
- **Set Goals and Priorities.** Decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload. Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- **Stay Connected** with people who can provide emotional and other support. To reduce stress, ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations.
- **Consider a Clinical Trial.** Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), NCCIH, and other research facilities across the country are studying the causes and effects of psychological stress, and stress management techniques. You can learn more about studies that are recruiting by visiting [www.nimh.nih.gov/joinastudy](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/joinastudy) or [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) (keyword: stress).

## 5 If you're overwhelmed by stress, ask for help from a health professional.

You should seek help right away if you have suicidal thoughts, are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope. Your doctor may be able to provide a recommendation. You can find resources to help you find a mental health provider by visiting [www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp).

### Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Anyone experiencing severe or long-term, unrelenting stress can become overwhelmed. If you or a loved one is having thoughts of suicide, call the toll-free **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** (<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service is available to anyone. All calls are confidential.

### For More Information

For more information on conditions that affect mental health, resources, and research, visit [www.mentalhealth.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.gov), or the NIMH website at [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov). In addition, the National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus service has information on a wide variety of health topics, including conditions that affect mental health.



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of Mental Health

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To view our entire class schedule  
go to [health.ucdavis.edu/health-education](http://health.ucdavis.edu/health-education)



## Additional Learning Opportunities

Health Management and Education has many classes available on a variety of health topics. Most classes are free. We offer weekend and evening classes as well.

### Other Class Topics

- Heart Health
- Diabetes
- Weight Management
- Stress Reduction
- Tobacco Cessation
- Chronic Kidney Disease
- And much more

### Three Easy Ways to Register:

1. Self register on MyUCDavisHealth
  - If you need any additional assistance with scheduling through MyUCDavisHealth, please visit our webpage at [health.ucdavis.edu/livinghealthy/classes/enroll-class.html](http://health.ucdavis.edu/livinghealthy/classes/enroll-class.html)
2. Call our office to register at 916-946-1449
3. Email your request to [hs-healtheducationclass@ucdavis.edu](mailto:hs-healtheducationclass@ucdavis.edu)  
Include in your email:
  - First and last name
  - Date of birth
  - Medical record number (if known)
  - Class name
  - Class location
  - Class date and time







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