

Nine FAQs about stress

Q: What is stress?

A: Stress is how the brain and body respond to the demands of life, such as family, work, school, life changes and traumatic events. How you respond affects your health, and it is important to understand how to handle these stressful events in a productive and positive way.

There are four different kinds of stress:

- **Eustress** is positive or good stress. This type of stress can feel pleasant and/or rewarding after the stressful situation subsides.
- **Distress** is negative stress. Most people attribute their own stress to distress. Negative stress can be acute or chronic.
- **Acute stress** is extremely intense stress when it occurs but disappears after the event passes. An example of acute stress is being pulled over by a police officer and your heart rate goes up and you begin to sweat. Once the situation is resolved you begin feeling normal again.
- **Chronic stress** is less intense stress that usually lasts for a long period of time. An example of chronic stress is if you are dealing with pressure from credit card debt. You may feel an increase in headaches and have difficulty sleeping at night. These physical changes take a toll on your health and well-being.

Q: Who does stress affect?

A: Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people 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 keep happening over a long period of time.

Q: Is all stress bad?

A: No. Stress can motivate people to prepare or perform, like when they need to take a test or interview for a new job. Stress can be life-saving in response to danger as 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.

Q: Can stress cause me to gain or lose weight?

A: Yes. Stress can wreak havoc on your eating habits. When you are under stress, the balance of hormones in your body can change, leading to cravings, increased appetite or a lack of appetite. Limited time, energy and motivation can also affect your physiological approach to food, as well as what types of food you eat and when you eat. Changes in weight vary greatly from person to person depending on how they respond to stressful situations.

Q: Does stress affect my blood pressure?

A: Stress has not been shown to directly cause high blood pressure, but it can lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices that are associated with high blood pressure. Chronic stress can weaken your immune system and cause uncomfortable physical symptoms like headaches and stomach problems.

Q: Can medications help me lower my stress level?

A: Medicines are helpful for many things, but usually not for stress. Some people take tranquilizers to calm them down immediately, but it's far better in the long term to learn to manage your stress through relaxation or stress management techniques. Be careful not to confuse stress with anxiety. If you suffer from anxiety, speak with your doctor a treatment or management plan including whether you need medication.

Q: What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

A: PTSD develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD because they may continue to feel stressed or frightened even when they are not in danger.

Q: What causes stress?

A: A lot of things can cause stress—from personal problems to job and social issues including:

- Health—especially if you have a chronic illness such as heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis
- Emotional problems—anger you can't express, depression, grief, guilt, or low self-esteem
- Relationships—having problems with your relationships or feeling a lack of friendships or support in your life
- Major life changes—dealing with the death of a parent or spouse, losing your job, getting married, or moving to a new city
- Family—such as having a child, teen, or other family member who is under stress, or being a caregiver to a family member who is elderly or who has health problems
- Conflicts with your beliefs and values—you may value family life, but you may not be able to spend as much time with your family as you want
- Environment—living in an area where overcrowding, crime, pollution, or noise is a problem can create chronic stress
- Social situation—not having enough money to cover your expenses, feeling lonely, or facing discrimination based on your race, gender, age, or sexual orientation can add stress to your life
- Employment—being unhappy with your work or finding your job too demanding can lead to chronic stress. Losing your job or not being able to find work is also very stressful

Q: What can I do to reduce my stress?

A: There are countless quick, easy, and cost-free actions you can take to reduce your stress. Here's a few to consider: meditate, exercise, create a support network, think positive, avoid excess caffeine, laugh, focus on you.

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)

Sources: American Heart Association, National Institute of Mental Health, WebMD

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