

MANAGING STRESS

for Better
Heart Health



 Marshfield Clinic
 MINISTRY HEALTH CARE



Two Leaders, One Leading Heart Care Team

Understanding Stress

Many of the reasons that we go to the doctor may actually be related to stress. These can include very serious medical conditions. For example, high blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and may be linked to high levels of stress.

The specific relationship between stress and heart disease is not fully understood. It is believed that stress might be an independent risk factor. Stress may also affect other risk factors by making them worse. Research strongly suggests that stress causes an increase in some behaviors (such as smoking, drinking alcohol, overeating and inactivity) that are known risk factors for heart disease.

What is stress?

People often think of stress as demands at work, financial worries or sick children. While all of these things may be triggers, stress is actually the way your body reacts to the triggers. The stress response is part of the body's natural fight-or-flight reaction. It is a set of physical changes in your body that provides a burst of energy and a heightening of your senses, briefly giving you the ability to perform at a higher level when most needed. It is your ally when you are about to compete or deal with an urgent life-threatening situation because it gears you up for a challenge.

The problem comes in when the stress response is stimulated too frequently by little things that can keep you geared up for an extended period of time. Such constant stress is hard on the body, including the cardiovascular system.

It is important to recognize when the stress you experience is good stress, when it is bad stress, and to take measures to reduce bad stress.



Signs of stress

The physical impact that stress has on your heart and other parts of your body can be determined by your health care provider, but there are many symptoms that you can watch for:

- Headaches
- Backaches
- Neck aches
- Stomach aches
- Tight muscles in the jaw or neck
- Feeling tense
- Insomnia
- Lack of energy
- Irritability
- Fidgeting
- Nervous habits
- Impatience
- Forgetfulness
- Feeling anxious, angry, depressed, helpless, or out of control

If you experience any of these signs on a consistent basis, it may be due to stress. Do not avoid coping with stress. Ignoring the problem generally makes it worse.



Manage Stress for Better Health

Learning to avoid the causes of stress will help you reduce it. There are also things you can do to help your body manage or resist the stress you do experience.

■ CUT BACK ON CAFFEINE

Caffeine is a strong stimulant that generates a stress reaction in the body. It is commonly found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate and some nuts. The caffeine in 2 to 4 cups of coffee per day is a safe amount for most people. Reducing caffeine is best done gradually, allowing you to adjust to lower levels. If you can get to the point where you are caffeine free for about three weeks, you may find yourself feeling much better all the time – instead of just when you've had a cup of coffee.

■ GET ENOUGH SLEEP

When you're tired, it's harder to cope with life's situations. But being well-rested helps you to be more resilient and adaptable and helps your body deal with stress more effectively. The majority of adults require 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night, while some need as many as 10 and a few as little as 5. If you don't feel well rested, try to go to bed 30 to 60 minutes earlier at night.

■ TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Your body will relax from a stressful state if you breathe in and out slowly. Inhale while counting slowly to 7. Then, gradually exhale while counting to 11. Repeat until your heart rate slows down and you feel more normal.

■ AVOID STRESSFUL PEOPLE

Stress is catchy. Being around someone who is under stress can lead to your own anxiety and stress. Recognize when this is happening and get some distance when you need to.

■ BALANCE YOUR LIFE

Prioritize what's most important to you and give yourself permission to spend your time and energy on the things that give you the most satisfaction and joy.





■ **EAT RIGHT**

A poor diet is bad for your body and your mind. Take small steps every day to make healthier food choices.

■ **BE ACTIVE**

Aerobic exercise is one of the best ways to get rid of the excess energy that stress produces in your body. Find an exercise program that's right for you and be active most days of the week. Talk to your health care provider before starting a new exercise plan.

■ **AVOID MONEY PROBLEMS**

Set and stick to a realistic budget (even during the holiday season) to reduce overspending worries. Separate "needs" from "wants" and budget accordingly.

■ **CUT BACK ON COMMITMENTS**

Eliminate nonessential activities that contribute to an over-busy schedule so you have more time to do the things you enjoy. Schedule downtime and "me time" to relax.

■ **DON'T TRY TO DO EVERYTHING YOURSELF**

Delegate! Make your expectations for others clear, and lower your standards a touch when perfection isn't critical.

■ **ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED IT**

Stress can compound over time. Talk with family, friends, clergy or your health care provider about your concerns and ask for support. Acknowledging you need help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Medical Help in Managing Stress

If your doctor determines stress is putting you in an unhealthy situation, he or she may advise changes in your lifestyle. Medication could also be prescribed, particularly if lifestyle changes are unsuccessful in reducing your stress.

It is a good idea to have a complete picture of your health. Ask your health care provider about your risks for stress, high blood pressure and other risk factors for heart disease – and talk about ways you can do something about them.

For more information on stress management, diet, exercise, risk factors for heart disease and more, visit oneheartcareteam.org and click on **LEARN MORE**.

CERTAINTY

When you're facing heart disease, you have access to the most comprehensive care in the region.

Relax... Take Comfort in Knowing the Best Heart Care is Right Here

The Marshfield Clinic and Ministry Health Care heart care team is recognized for providing some of the best heart care in the nation. Locally, no other provider has more tools for detecting and treating heart disease.

It's the team with the most sophisticated diagnostic scanners and more heart specialists handling the most complex cases – and, when it comes to clinical research, no other area provider is even close.

That's important to know because having more tools means that you have access to more options for your heart care. It's individualized medicine, tailored to your specific situation.

Choose the certainty of customized care. Choose the Marshfield Clinic and Ministry Health Care heart care team.

To find a primary care provider in your area, please visit us online at www.oneheartcareteam.org

LOCAL ACCESS TO ADVANCED CARE

-
- Mercer
 - Park Falls
 - Eagle River
 - Minocqua/Woodruff
 - Rhinelander
 - Tomahawk
 - Crandon
 - Merrill
 - Wausau
 - Weston
 - Wittenberg
 - Stanley
 - Marshfield
 - Stevens Point/Plover
 - Wisconsin Rapids

Marshfield Clinic cardiologists are available for appointments and consultations at 15 locations.



Marshfield Clinic



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For a second opinion, or for more information on our heart care team, call us at **1-800-888-4755**