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Neighborhood Health Partners

## Dealing with Your Stress

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### What is stress?

Stress is a reaction to change. Stress can have to do with your body, mind or emotions—or all three.

### What can happen when your stress gets out of hand?

Stress that is not dealt with can lead to serious health problems:

- Heart disease
- Digestive problems
- Sleep problems
- Depression
- Obesity
- Skin conditions
- Pain

### What are the best ways to manage stress?

Create a plan. List your goals. Then put them in order, with the most important first. This list can help you reduce your anxiety. Make your goals SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Timely

**Pick one important task and work on it.** Once you finish that task, pick another. Be honest about what you can handle. Learn to say “no” to things that overwhelm you. Admit that you’re not a superhero. Ask yourself what really needs to be done. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

**Create peace.** Being quiet and breathing deeply for 10-20 minutes a day can help relieve stress. The extra oxygen flowing through your body will help calm you. Try yoga or stretching. Concentrate on controlling your breathing and moving slowly. This activity can improve sleep, increase flexibility, help with weight loss and improve balance.

**Create activity.** Try to get regular exercise. Exercise has many benefits:

- Boosts energy levels
- Improves mood
- Makes you sleep better
- Lowers blood pressure
- Helps with weight loss

Think about hobbies you enjoy. Can you make one of these hobbies part of your life?

Laughter reduces stress and helps your blood vessels stay healthy.

Listening to music can often make you feel better. Music also improves your blood flow, blood pressure, breathing and posture.

Write about your thoughts and feelings for 15 minutes each day. Journaling leads to fewer doctor visits and improves mental health.

**Eat healthy.** Good nutrition helps with stress reduction. Limiting your caffeine and alcohol is especially helpful. Keep unhealthy comfort foods to a minimum. Keeping them out of sight helps!

**Find Fellowship.** Share your feelings with close friends or family. Don’t try to make it alone. Let others provide love, care and advice.

**Create a stress-free environment.** Surround yourself with relaxing things. Some examples include ...

- Put special photos around your house
- Add color to your clothing and furniture
- Hug others
- Snuggle with a pet
- Find ways to get more fresh air
- Plant your favorite flower in your garden or keep it in your house

### What are the best ways to manage sleep?

**Try to find balance.** Aim for eight hours of work, eight hours of recreation and eight hours of sleep each day. We know this aim is not always possible, but do try to balance work, play and sleep.

**Achieve optimal sleeping condition.** This means a quiet, dark, cool room. Use a white noise machine if needed to achieve a quiet room. Try to get comfy pajamas, bedding and mattresses to make the best sleep environment possible.

*Sleep when you are tired.* If you can't fall asleep in bed, try reading a book or doing crossword puzzles. If you still are not tired, do something around the house or clean something. Come back to bed when you are tired.

*Avoid sleep-busters.* The following things can cause you to sleep poorly:

- Don't hit the snooze button. Set your alarm and get up when it goes off.
- Don't drink caffeine or alcohol three to four hours before sleep.
- Keep your naps under 30 minutes to an hour.

*Enjoy the benefits of better sleep.* When you sleep well, you also often see the following benefits:

- A smaller waistline
- Better heart health
- Better decision making

### **Healthy Ways to Problem Solve**

Try using the sentences below to help solve problems. In this example, we've filled in some ideas. Just replace those with the words that are true for you:

**I want to ...** feel better

**But ...** I am so stressed

**So ...**

- I am going to exercise 30 minutes a day, four times a week.
- I'm going to write in a journal every night for 10 minutes.
- I'm going to talk to my doctor about how I've been feeling.