

Coping with Stress

Stress is an emotional and physical reaction to change. Everyone has stress. Stress can be positive and give you energy or it can be unhealthy and cause health problems. Stress for short periods may not affect you but stress over time can cause or make some illnesses worse, such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, asthma or arthritis.

Causes

Causes of stress vary from person to person. Some common causes of stress can be a death of a family member, illness, taking care of your family, relationship changes, work, job change, moving and money. Even small things such as long waits or delays or traffic can cause stress.

Signs

Some common signs of unhealthy stress:

- Feeling nervous, sad or angry
- Fast pounding heartbeat
- Hard time breathing
- Sweating
- Pain or tense muscles in the neck, shoulders, back, jaw or face
- Headaches
- Feeling tired or having trouble sleeping
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Upset stomach, lack of appetite or weight loss

Tips for Coping with Stress

Watch for signs of stress. When they occur, try to avoid the cause or change how you react. Other helpful tips:

- Do something that relaxes you such as: deep and slow breathing, stretching exercises, yoga, a massage, meditation, listening to music, reading, a hot bath or shower.
- Get a hobby or do something you enjoy.
- Learn to accept things that you cannot change.
- Think positive.
- Set limits. Learn to say no. Take one thing at a time.
- Get 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, protein and whole grains. Limit caffeine and sugar.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise will help relax tense muscles, improve your mood and help you sleep better.
- Talk to your family and friends about your problems.
- Do not deal with stress in unhealthy ways such as eating too much, not eating enough, using tobacco products, drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Get help from a professional if you need it. A counselor can help you cope with stress and deal with problems. Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help with sad feelings, nervousness or trouble sleeping.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have signs of stress.