



## April is National Stress Awareness Month

# Stress management

Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster and give you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight stress response.

Some stress is normal and even useful. The right level of stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you win a race or finish a job on time. Too little stress leads to performance below your potential and too much impairs performance. The right level of stress for maximum performance is different for each of us.

If stress happens too often, lasts too long or is too high it can have bad effects. It can be linked to headaches, an upset stomach, back pain and trouble sleeping. If you already have a health problem, stress may make it worse. It can make you moody, tense or depressed. Your relationships may suffer, and you may not do well at work or school.

### Tips to cope with stress

Stress is a fact of life for most people. You may not be able to get rid of stress, but you can look for ways to lower it.

- **Manage your time.** Make a schedule, think about which things are most important and do those first.
- **Find better ways to cope.** Look at how you have been dealing with stress. Be honest about what works and what does not.
- **Take good care of yourself.** Exercise regularly. Get plenty of rest. Eat well. Don't smoke. Limit how much alcohol you drink.
- **Reevaluate your thinking.** Write down your worries and work on letting go of things you cannot change.
- **Focus on the present.** Try meditation or guided imagery exercises.
- **Let your feelings out.** Talk, laugh, cry and express anger when you need to.
- **Do something you enjoy.** A hobby can help you relax. Volunteer work or work that helps others can be a great stress reliever.
- **Ask for help.** Building a strong network of friends, supporters and family can be a positive tool in managing stress.

Sometimes stress is just too much to handle alone. Talking to a friend or family member may help, but you may also want to speak to a professional.

**Visit your member website for more information.**