



Understanding and managing stress

Stress and the stress response

Stress is an automatic physical reaction to pressure or danger. It is your body's response to change in its environment. Understanding stress and its effects can help you stay healthier.

Your body responds to stress in many ways:

- Hormones, like adrenaline, surge.
- Your heartbeat and blood pressure increase.
- Your blood sugar rises.

These changes are called the stress response.

Stress is as much a part of life as eating and breathing. Some stress can be good for you, giving you energy to meet life's challenges. However, too much stress can be harmful to your physical and mental well-being.

Addressing job-related stress

Many situations can create stress. One of the most common is your job because of:

- Feeling overworked and underappreciated
- Poor work conditions
- Problems with coworkers

Too much stress on the job can cause “burn-out.” You might end up feeling depressed, exhausted and hopeless. You may even become physically ill.

To cope, you have to first figure out what's causing the problem. Try to:

- See if you can change your environment
- Communicate better with your manager and coworkers
- Set limits as to what you will and will not do to lower pressure on yourself
- Take breaks when needed

Addressing the problems you face can help you feel less stressed and can actually help you work better.

Adrenaline and your stress response

Recall the last time you were frightened or startled. You probably noticed that your heart pounded, your breath became shallow, and you broke into a sweat. Why? Because of adrenaline.

Adrenaline is a hormone that your body makes. It gives you the strength and alertness to fight off or escape danger. This is called the “fight or flight” response. Getting stuck in traffic, having a deadline to meet or having a conflict with a



friend can cause adrenaline to surge. A certain amount of it can even make you feel good. For example, adrenaline may surge when you get a promotion or get married.

Constant stress produces high levels of adrenaline that can affect your health. Too much adrenaline can raise your blood pressure and your blood sugar, which can weaken your heart and other organs. You might also have problems sleeping or eating. And too much stress can cause anxiety and depression.

The key to managing stress is to make sure you have balance in your life between stress and relaxation. If you think you need help, be sure to talk to your doctor.