

## Signs and symptoms of stress

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The most difficult thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar — even normal. You don't notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll. That's why it's important to be aware of the common warning signs and symptoms of stress overload.

### Thinking symptoms

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor judgement
- Seeing only the negative
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying

### Emotional symptoms

- Depression or general unhappiness
- Anxiety and agitation
- Moodiness, irritability, or anger
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loneliness and isolation
- Other mental or emotional health problems

### Physical symptoms

- Aches and pains
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Nausea, dizziness
- Chest pain, rapid heart rate
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds or flu

### Behavioral symptoms

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities

- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

## How much stress is too much?

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Because of the widespread damage stress can cause, it's important to know your own limit. But just how much stress is "too much" differs from person to person. Some people seem to be able to roll with life's punches, while others tend to crumble in the face of small obstacles or frustrations. Some people even thrive on the excitement of a high-stress lifestyle.

### Things that influence your stress tolerance level

- **Your support network** - A strong network of supportive friends and family members is an enormous buffer against stress. When you have people you can count on, life's pressures don't seem as overwhelming. On the flip side, the lonelier and more isolated you are, the greater your risk of succumbing to stress.
- **Your sense of control** - If you have confidence in yourself and your ability to influence events and persevere through challenges, it's easier to take stress in your stride. On the other hand, if you believe that you have little control over your life—that you're at the mercy of your environment and circumstances, with limited ability to make changes—stress is more likely to knock you off course.
- **Your attitude and outlook** - The way you look at life and its inevitable challenges makes a huge difference in your ability to handle stress. If you're generally hopeful and optimistic, you'll be less vulnerable. Stress-hardy people tend to embrace challenges, have a stronger sense of humor, believe in a higher purpose, and accept change as an inevitable part of life.
- **Your ability to deal with your emotions** - If you don't know how to calm and soothe yourself when you're feeling sad, angry, or troubled, you're more likely to become stressed and agitated. Having the ability to [identify and deal appropriately with your emotions](#) can increase your tolerance to stress and help you bounce back from adversity.
- **Your knowledge and preparation** - The more you know about a stressful situation—including how long it will last and what to expect—the easier it is to cope. For example, if you go into surgery with a realistic picture of what to expect post-op, a painful recovery will be less stressful than if you were expecting to bounce back immediately.

## What can you do to reduce your stress?

Sometimes it can be difficult to see a way to help yourself when you are stressed. It takes energy to help yourself which is often being used to support your sick child.

It is of course very important to look after yourself as well because if you are overwhelmed with stress it affects everything you do as well as your long-term health.

Here are some tips and ideas that might help.

### Exercise

Upping your activity level is something you can do right now to help relieve stress and start to feel better. Regular exercise can lift your mood and serve as a distraction from worries, allowing you to break out of the cycle of negative thoughts that feed stress. Rhythmic exercises such as walking, running, swimming, and dancing are particularly effective, because they take you into a rhythm that allows you to relax.



### Meeting people and connecting

The simple act of talking face-to-face with another human can trigger hormones that relieve stress when you're feeling agitated or insecure. Even just a brief exchange of kind words or a friendly look from another human being can help calm and soothe your nervous system. So spend time with people who make you feel good and don't let your responsibilities keep you from having a social life.

We know that linking with other LHM members through the closed member groups can also help to create links. Meeting up with other families in the holidays or at LHM events can really help.

You can also phone the LHM team, we will always offer a listening ear. A problem shared really can help.

## Engage your senses.

Another fast way to relieve stress is by engaging one or more of your senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, or movement. The key is to find the sensory input that works for you. Does listening to an uplifting song make you feel calm? Or smelling ground coffee? Or maybe petting an animal works quickly to make you feel centered? Everyone responds to sensory input a little differently, so experiment to find what works best for you.

## Find ways to relax



## Relaxation Techniques: Accessing the Relaxation Response

You can't completely eliminate stress from your life, but you can control how much it affects you. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the polar opposite of the stress response. When practiced regularly, these activities can reduce your everyday stress levels and boost feelings of joy and serenity. They also increase your ability to stay calm and collected under pressure.

## Eat a healthy diet

The food you eat can improve or worsen your mood and affect your ability to cope with life's stressors. Eating a diet full of processed and convenience food, refined carbohydrates, and sugary snacks can worsen symptoms of stress while eating a diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables, high-quality protein, and omega-3 fatty acids, can help you better cope with life's ups and downs. Drinking lots of water also helps to refresh your body.

Get enough rest



Feeling tired can increase stress by causing you to think irrationally. At the same time, chronic stress can disrupt your sleep. Whether you're having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night, there are plenty of ways to improve your sleep so you feel less stressed and more productive and emotionally balanced.

## **Stress resources**

Anxiety UK - <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/anxiety-type/stress/>

Sleep Council - <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/latest-news/seven-steps-perfect-nights-sleep/>

Mind - [https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/signs-of-stress/#.WtSVN-mG\\_IU](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/signs-of-stress/#.WtSVN-mG_IU)