

How *Stress* Affects Your Health

Stress, we've all felt it. Sometimes stress can be a positive force, motivating you to perform well at your piano recital or job interview. But often—like when you're stuck in traffic—it's a negative force. If you experience stress over a prolonged period, it could become chronic—unless you take action.

Have you ever found yourself with sweaty hands on a first date or felt your heart pound during a scary movie? Then you know you can feel stress in both your mind and body.

This automatic response developed in our ancient ancestors as a way to protect them from predators and other threats. Faced with danger, the body kicks into gear, flooding the body with stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol that elevate your heart rate, increase your blood pressure, boost your energy, and prepare you to deal with the problem.

These days, you're not likely to face the threat of being eaten. But you probably do confront multiple challenges every day, such as meeting deadlines, paying bills, and juggling childcare that make your body react the same way. As a result, your body's natural alarm system—the “fight or flight” response—may be stuck in the on position. And that can have serious consequences for your health.

When stress starts interfering with your ability to live a normal life for an extended period, it becomes even more dangerous. The longer the stress lasts, the worse it is for both your mind and body. You might

feel fatigued, unable to concentrate, or irritable for no good reason, for example. But chronic stress causes wear and tear on your body, too.

The stress response system and the overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones that come with it can disrupt almost all of your body's processes. This can put you at increased risk for a variety of physical and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, digestive issues, headaches, muscle tension and pain, heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke, sleep problems, weight gain, and memory and concentration impairment.

Chronic stress may also cause disease, either because of changes in your body or the overeating, smoking, and other bad habits people use to cope with stress. Job strain - high demands coupled with low decision-making latitude - is associated with increased risk of coronary disease, for example.

Reducing your stress levels can not only make you feel better right now, but may also protect your health long-term.

Strategies for reducing stress include:

Identify what's causing stress. Monitor your state of mind throughout the day. If you feel stressed, write down the cause, your thoughts, and your mood. Once you know what's bothering you, develop a plan for addressing it.

Build strong relationships. Reach out to family members or close friends and let them know you're having a tough time. They may be able to offer practical assistance and support, useful ideas, or just a fresh perspective as you begin to tackle whatever's causing your stress.

Walk away when you're angry. Before you react, take time to regroup by counting to 10. Then reconsider. Walking or other physical activities can also help you work off steam. *(Continued on Page 2)*





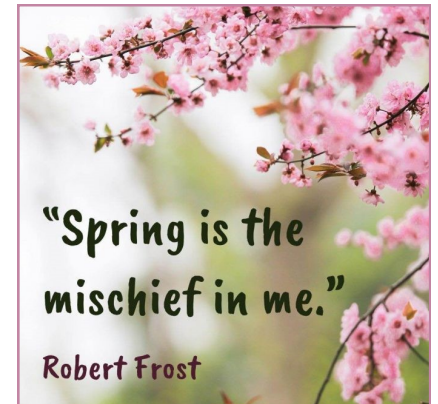
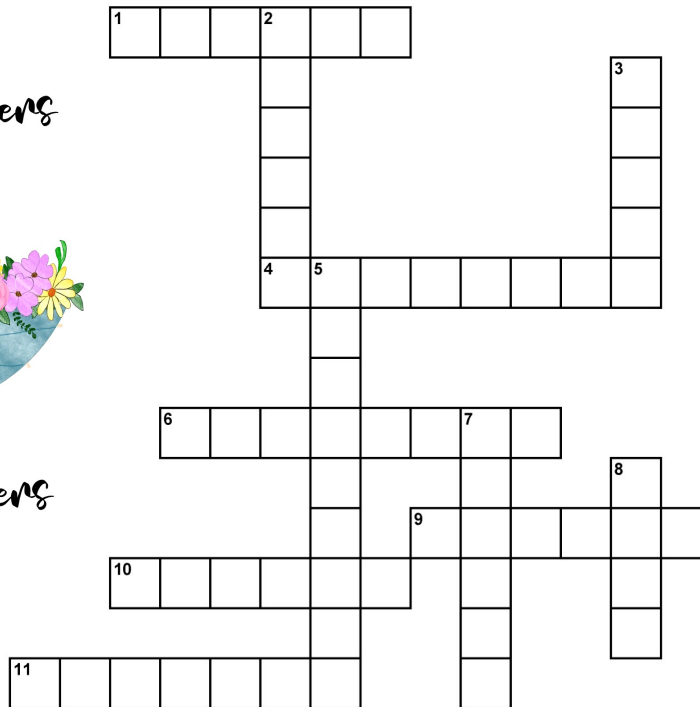
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Rest your mind. To help ensure you get the recommended seven or eight hours of shut-eye, cut back on caffeine, remove distractions such as television or computers from your bedroom, and go to bed at the same time each night.

Get help. If you continue to feel overwhelmed, consult with your provider, or a psychologist or other licensed mental health professional who can help you learn how to manage stress effectively.

Here is a link to another article on handling stress: **11 healthy ways to handles life stressors.** When stress becomes unmanageable, try these evidence-based tools to tackle it in healthy ways.

Access strategies here: <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/tips>



Across

- [1] Hatching chirps
- [4] Needed to find the pot of gold
- [6] Three strikes & homeruns
- [9] Don't put all of your eggs here
- [10] Yogi the bear will help himself to this
- [11] He loves me, he loves me not

Down

- [2] Four leafs for luck
- [3] Green and covers your lawn
- [5] Runny nose and watery eyes
- [7] Rake or make mulch out of them
- [8] A home for birds

This newsletter is for YOU!!! Please reach out to me, Alison Simo, Thrive Alliance Wellness Education Coordinator and Dementia Health Coach for suggestions at any time at 812-418-6690 or asimo@thrive-alliance.org.