

Stress Less



Managing stress in a world of stressors

Stress: We all experience it. Not all stress is bad, of course. Training for a marathon, preparing to defend your dissertation or working toward any other big goal can be a form of healthy stress. However, unmanaged, day-to-day aggravations and major life upheavals can eventually take a toll on your health.

What Is Stress?

Stress is your body's way of preparing for a threat—real or imagined. When you're stressed, your body physically prepares for danger. Your heart rate increases, your pupils dilate, your blood is diverted to your muscles. It's the classic "fight or flight" mode. When the immediate danger passes, your physiological functions return to normal.

People who struggle with chronic stress, however, are stuck in "fight or flight." Over time, chronic stress can cause headaches, sleep problems, sadness and anger, as well as serious health problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and depression.

Adults are not the only ones who experience stress. Family challenges (divorce or moving, for example), too many scheduled activities and struggles with peers can stress children, causing them to wet the bed, act out, have trouble sleeping or complain of headaches and stomachaches.

Today, many of us are facing a new kind of stress: technostress. Are you tethered to your electronic devices? Do you constantly check texts, emails or the latest social media post? According to the American Psychological Association, about 43 percent of Americans are self-described "constant checkers," and one out of five of us identify technology as a somewhat or very significant source of stress, especially when outside of work.

Managing Stress

You CAN manage your stress—in small ways and big ways. Here are a few tips for managing your stress.

Breathe. Yes, just the simple act of taking a few slow, mindful breaths throughout the day can significantly reduce your stress.

Unplug. Periodically unplugging (taking a digital detox) is good for you—and your children's—mental health. Designate certain times, such as dinner hour, as electronic-free times. Turn off notifications. Those little dings that announce a new message produce bursts of feel-good hormones in your brain.

ACTION ITEMS

Recognize the signs of being overstressed. If you suspect stress is getting the best of you or someone in your family, talk to your doctor before it starts affecting your long-term health.

Do You Have Signs of Chronic Stress?

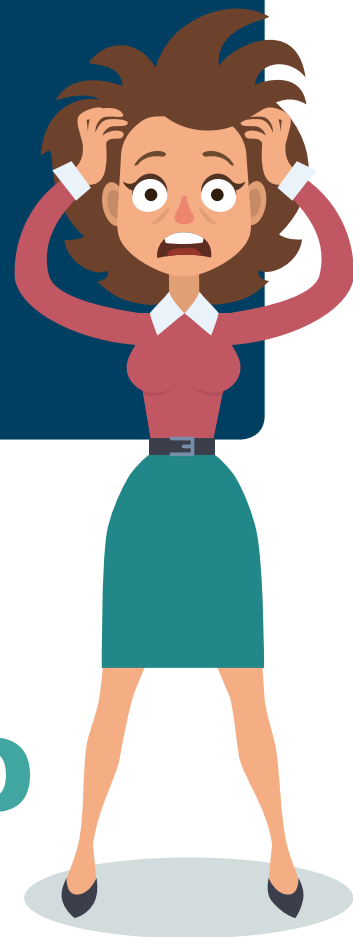
- Headaches
- Sleep problems or difficulty relaxing
- Sadness
- Anger
- Irritability
- Memory loss
- Diminished concentration

Are you a "constant checker?"

About

43%

of Americans say they constantly check email, texts and social media accounts, although at least one in five admits technology is a somewhat or very significant source of stress. Take periodic breaks from technology. It's a great way to relieve stress.



No wonder we're all addicted to our devices! Turn off your devices in the evening to give your mind time to unwind before bedtime.

Connect socially—IRL (in real life). Keeping up with friends and family on social media is great, but don't let it replace spending quality time with people you care about—especially your children. One of the best ways to help your children manage stress is to make time for them. Use time together to encourage them to talk about what causes them stress and model good stress-management behavior.

Take care of yourself. Eat right, exercise, limit your alcohol consumption, get enough sleep and spend time on enjoyable activities.

For more information, call 731-644-3463 or go online at www.hcmc-tn.org.