

Stress and Your Health: How Stress Affects Your Immune System and More

Subtopics

[Blood Pressure & Stroke \(5\)](#) [Mental Health \(12\)](#) [Healthy Lifestyle Choices \(3\)](#) [Other Conditions \(9\)](#) [Heart Disease \(4\)](#) [Stress and Immunity \(6\)](#)

[Stress](#) Learn tips for diagnosing your condition and how to treat it! www.EverydayHealth.com

[13 Signs of Burnout](#) Avoiding Stress, Depression and Burnout by expert Henry Neils www.assessment.com

[Stress Management](#) Find essential health information at the Internet for Women. www.ivillage.com

Articles & Resources

[Strategies to Sharpen Thinking Skills](#)

While stress can negatively impact your thinking skills, contributing to memory problems and fuzzy thinking, these techniques have been shown by research to sharpen thinking skills and cognitive functioning while relieving stress and bringing other health benefits at the same time. Learn effective and natural strategies for relieving stress and improving your thinking skills.

[Body Care: Why You Should Take Care Of Your Body and Your Health](#)

If your health fails, it can overshadow everything else that's going on in your life. From major health problems to minor aches and pains, health can really impact happiness and stress levels. Making a commitment for body care and wellness has a big payoff: you'll feel better in everything you do. Here are a few healthy habits that carry a big impact:

[Help! What Are Some Effective Strategies For Coping With Illness?](#)

When diagnosed with a serious condition, stress can increase the difficulty of coping with illness. And, according to a recent poll on this site, a significant percentage of people believe that stress may be at least in part responsible for a serious illness. For these reasons, it's important to have effective stress relievers and coping strategies in place to stay as healthy as possible. Find key strategies for coping with illness, with additional resources for healthy living.

[Is Your Level of Stress Unhealthy? The Stress and Health Self Test](#)

Stress can affect your health in significant ways. While this test is not meant to replace an assessment from your doctor, it can give you an idea of whether your level of stress may be impacting your health, and to what degree. More importantly, you'll find information explaining how stress affects health, and important resources for creating a healthier, more balanced lifestyle.

[Stress and Health Quiz: How Does Stress Affect Your Health?](#)

You may have already learned from this site or other sources that stress can affect your health in a negative way, but do you know exactly how? This quiz is designed to test your knowledge, pique your interest, and inform you on the connection between stress and your body. Topics include cortisol, sleep deprivation, and other factors.

[Stress and Women's Health: Reduce Stress and Stay Healthy](#)

Stress affects women's health in many ways. Choosing the right ways to relieve stress and making the right choices for a healthy lifestyle is very important for women, and women's choices may be different from men's because women are different. Learn more about stress and women's health, the special issues that women deal with, and ways women can relieve stress and stay healthy.

[How Can I Prevent Stress-Related Psychosomatic Illness? Is It In My Head?](#)

It's pretty common knowledge that stress can make you sick. However, should psychosomatic illness due to stress be ignored, or treated just like other health problem? How can it be prevented? Get answers to frequently asked questions about stress and psychosomatic illness, and learn to be healthier and happier.

[Socioeconomic Status and Stress Levels: How Are They Related?](#)

Many people expect that income levels and job stress levels are related: those with higher-powered jobs must experience additional job-related stress, right? The opposite is actually true! Learn how socioeconomic status affects stress levels, to what degree, and how everyone can decrease their stress levels and improve health

[Stress and Weight Gain: Can Stress Make You Fat?](#)

Stress and weight gain are linked in several ways. Cortisol, emotional eating, and lack of exercise are all factors. Learn how stress and weight gain are linked, and find resources for creating healthier lifestyle that reduces both your stress level and your weight.

[Stress Management: A Natural Way To Avoid Colds and the Flu, and Stay Healthy](#)

You may be getting flu shots, taking vitamins and washing your hands, but practicing stress management techniques is an important and all-natural way to stay healthy during cold and flu season and avoid more serious health problems year round. Learn more about how stress can affect your health, the link between stress and sickness, and what you can do to avoid illness and stay healthier.

[Exercise as a Stress Management Tool: Improve Your Mood, Boost Immunity, Look Better and Relieve Stress with Exercise](#)

While exercise can help your overall health and longevity, and assist you with weight-loss goals, physical exercise has many stress management benefits as well. Learn why working out and getting more physical activity in your life can help you relieve tension and manage stress with increased endorphins, social support, improved immunity and other positive benefits of exercise. Not only will you be more relaxed and happy, you'll be healthier as well.

[Stress, Humor and Health: How Laughter Can Reduce Stress and Increase Health](#)

Research shows that laughter has some amazing health benefits. Laughing can relieve stress, increase pain tolerance and support the immune system, as well as serve several other healthy purposes. Learn more about the positive effects of laughter and how to use humor to relieve tension, manage stress and improve overall health and well-being.

[Caffeine, Stress and Your Health: Is Caffeine Your Friend or Your Foe?](#)

Caffeine is a drug, popularly consumed in coffee, tea, soft drinks and, in smaller doses, chocolate. While we seem to have a love affair with these products, there's been quite a bit of confusion and even controversy surrounding caffeine lately. Is it good or bad for us? Here's a brief tutorial on caffeine, and some surprising answers to these questions.

[Job Stress: Chronic Job Stress is a Risk Factor for Heart Disease and Diabetes](#)

Recent studies have found a link between chronic job stress and metabolic syndrome, a cluster of health factors that increase the risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other health conditions. Learn what you can do to reduce work-related stress and stay healthier.

[Cortisol and Stress: How Cortisol Affects Your Body, and How To Stay Healthy in the Face of Stress](#)

Cortisol is known as 'the stress hormone' because stress activates cortisol secretion. While it is important in proper body functioning, too much cortisol in your bloodstream can lead to serious health consequences. Learn more about cortisol, the effects of cortisol, and how to stay healthy in the face of stress.

[Stress and Health: How Stress Affects Your Body, and How You Can Stay Healthier](#)

Learn about the different types of stress and how they can affect your body and health, plus find resources on how to reduce the level of stress in your life and manage the stress you experience.

[Stress-Related Conditions: What Are They?](#)

Stress can affect the body in so many ways! Here's a list of various health problems that can be caused or exacerbated by stress, including heart disease, stroke, sexual dysfunction and more.

[Stress and Health Problems](#)

It's widely recognized that stress affects your health. Here is a breakdown on the specific health problems that can be caused or worsened by stress, with an explanation of how this happens.

[Find Your "Real Age"](#)

Sure, you know how long you've been on the planet, but do you really know how much your body has aged in this time? This site discusses how your actions can cause more or less wear and tear on your body, and includes a thorough test you can take to see what your 'real age' is! It also gives you a personalized plan to lower your stress and make your body healthier.

[Dr. Judith Orloff on Positive Energy](#)

Dr. Judith Orloff explains what 'intuitive empathy' is, and how it can make us healthier, happier and less stressed. This article can be helpful on several levels.

[Toxic Emotions](#)

Learn how harmful emotional states can cause stress that causes baldness, ulcers, high blood pressure and other health problems, and what you can do to release these toxic emotions.

[Eight Indicators of Stress Level](#)

Research shows that chronic stress can create physical changes like weaker muscles, bone loss, increased abdominal fat and weaker immune function. Read more about the physical signs of chronic stress, and some of what you can do to counteract these effects.

Articles & Resources

[Develop An Internal Locus of Control](#)

Research has shown that those with an internal locus of control--that is, they feel that they control their own destiny, rather than an external locus of control where they feel their fate being largely determined by outside forces--tend to be happier, less depressed, and less stressed. Fortunately, if your locus of control isn't as 'internal' as you'd like it to be, there are things you can do to change your locus of control and empower yourself. Here's a process to practice:

[Overcoming Perfectionism: How To Develop a Healthier Outlook](#)

Perfectionism can rob you of your peace of mind, enjoyment of life, and self esteem. Though it's a process that may take a little time, overcoming perfectionism can greatly decrease the level of stress you feel on a daily basis. Here are some important steps you can take to maintain a healthier attitude by overcoming perfectionism.

[How Does Positive Thinking Impact Your Stress Level?](#)

We all instinctively know that positive thinking is important, but do we specifically know why? Or how the power of positive thinking can impact stress levels? Discover the answers to these frequently asked questions and learn how you can harness the power of positive thinking to manage, reduce, or even eliminate stress from your experience.

[Stress, Anxiety and Sleep](#)

Sometimes stress and anxiety can cause us to lose sleep, which can in turn cause a host of other problems! Learn more about how your sleep can affect--and be affected by--your stress level, from About's guide to sleep disorders.

[PTSD Medline Plus](#)

Here's a whole collection of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder-related resources from the National Library of Medicine. Read the latest research, learn about the latest treatments, and more.

[Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Children](#)

Here's a brief article on how children can be deeply affected by trauma, with some related resources on helping your child cope with anxiety, depression and more from About's guide to parenting children ages K-6th grade.

[Do I Need Therapy? Take This Test!](#)

This test, from Psychology Today, asks you questions from various areas of your life to help you determine if you have healthy habits and behaviors or if you could benefit from professional intervention.

[Trauma and Your Mental Health](#)

Since the terrorist attacks and the advent of war, and more recently with the wave of major natural disasters, Americans have experienced many powerful new emotions. Learn what is a normal response to these abnormal situations and what might be indicative of a more serious problem.

[Anxiety Disorders Association of America](#)

Here's a great resource with information on Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Agoraphobia, Social Phobia, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and other stress- and anxiety- related disorders. Included is a special section for children and teens.

[Depression: Getting Help for Yourself](#)

Chronic stress can lead to depression. Listed are some great self-care strategies, along with information on different types of professional help that are available and how to get started with a therapist.

[Overcoming the Catch 22s of Depression](#)

Sometimes people suffering from depression know what they need to do to get better, but features of their condition make it especially difficult to do what they need to do. Read more about this, and what to do if you find yourself or a loved one in this position.

[The Effects of Stress and Psychological Disorders on The Immune System](#)

Here's an amazingly thorough research paper analyzing many aspects of stress and its effects on the immune system, including what cognitive coping strategies are less effective, what conditions can be caused by stress, and more.

[Stress and Health](#) > Stress and Immunity

Stress and Your Immune System

Articles & Resources

[How Stress Affects The Immune System](#)

About's Mental Health guide discusses the different types of events that trigger stress and how this stress effects the immune system's functioning, an important read for anyone experiencing stress who wants to stay healthy. (Doesn't that include all of us?)

[Daily Stress and Your Immune System](#)

Most of us know that chronic stress can have a negative impact on immunity and overall health. But this study shows that even minor ups and downs associated with everyday stress can affect immunity as well. Here's what you need to know.

[The Effects of Stress and Psychological Disorders on The Immune System](#)

Here's an amazingly thorough research paper analyzing many aspects of stress and its effects on the immune system, including what cognitive coping strategies are less effective, what conditions can be caused by stress, and more.

[Optimism and the Immune System](#)

Yes, here's proof that having an optimistic thinking style can help you handle stress better and translate into a better-functioning immune system! Read the specifics here.

[Stress Intensifies Cold and Flu Symptoms](#)

Many studies have shown a link between stress and illness. Here is another that shows how stress can intensify the common cold.

[Stress: A Cause of Cancer?](#)

Has a link been found between stress and cancer? Yes and no. This well-researched article has some great information and resources to keep you informed and help you make healthy choices, just to be safe.

Stress: A Cause of Cancer?

by Lisa Hurt Kozarovich
December 10, 2006

There's no escaping it: stress is a part of our lives. How we handle that stress can have an impact on our health. Every day, we hear more and more about the harm it may cause our minds and bodies, - from heart disease to anxiety attacks. Now researchers are trying to determine if stress is also a factor in who will develop cancer.

Currently, there is no evidence that stress is a direct cause of cancer. But evidence is accumulating that there is some link between stress and developing certain kinds of cancer, as well as how the disease progresses.

Hundreds of studies have measured how stress impacts our immune systems and fights disease. At Ohio State University, researcher Dr. Ron Glaser, Ph.D., found that students under pressure had slower-healing wounds and took longer to produce immune system cells that kill invading organisms. Renowned researcher Dr. Dean Ornish, M.D., who has spent 20 years examining the effects of stress on the body, found that stress-reduction techniques could actually help reverse heart disease. And Dr. Barry Spiegel, M.D., a leader in the field of psychosomatic medicine, found that metastatic breast cancer patients lived longer when they participated in support groups.

Other studies have gone as far as to show those women who experienced traumatic life events or losses in previous years had significantly higher rates of breast cancer.

Still, the National Cancer Institute reports, "Although studies have shown that stress factors, such as death of a spouse, social isolation, and medical school examinations, alter the way the immune system functions, they have not provided scientific evidence of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between these immune system changes and the development of cancer."

Nonetheless, some medical experts say therein lies the link between cancer and stress — if stress decreases the body's ability to fight disease, it loses the ability to kill cancer cells.

Every day, our bodies are exposed to cancer-causing agents in the air, food and water we're exposed to. Typically, our immune system recognizes those abnormal cells and kills them before they produce a tumor. There are three important things that can happen to prevent cancer from developing — the immune system can prevent the agents from invading in the first place, DNA can repair the abnormal cells or killer T-cells can kill off cancer cells.

Research has shown that stress can lower the body's ability to do each of those things, according to Dr. Lorenzo Cohen, Ph.D., assistant professor of behavioral sciences at the University of Texas, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Does that mean there's a direct link between stress and the risk of developing cancer? Not necessarily, Cohen said.

Part of the reason stress may be linked to cancer, he said, is simply that when people are under pressure they make poor choices — they begin smoking, stop exercising, start eating unhealthy foods — all factors that are also linked to cancer.

Even if that's not the case, "there are a lot of things that have to happen for cancer to develop. I think it's fair to say that stress could be one of the many components in lowering immune systems and therefore making us more susceptible to cancer and a faster progression of the disease. But stress might just be one piece of the puzzle — what percentage is the question. I fall back on the fact that regardless of what percentage it might be, it's a percentage we're more in control of. We can't control genetics, but we can change how we respond to stress," he said,

adding that it's not necessarily the stress itself as much as the way people handle stress that may be linked to disease.

That's why it's important the public understand the connection between stress and cancer, despite a lack of hard scientific evidence, according to Dr. Thomas J. Barnard, M.D., spokesman for the Physicians for Responsible Medicine and a practicing physician in Ontario.

"When you take the scientific information we have and combine it with the common sense evidence, there's clearly a link. Part of the problem we have in Western medicine is what we consider acceptable evidence," said Barnard, who teaches human biology and nutrition at the University of Guelph in Ontario and is an author.

"It would be nicer to have these markers more obvious, but I don't think we need cemented evidence before we encourage people to start moving in the direction of better health," he said.

"My advice for healthy living is this: Eat good food, get good exercise, be kind, be calm. It kind of incorporates what your grandma told you, but it may take science awhile to catch up with that."

OK, you now know that stress may have a negative impact on your health. But you also know you're never going to be completely rid of stress. The key isn't in doing away with all of life's pressures but in how you handle them on a daily basis.

Here are some tips for stress management from Reina Marino, M.D., a Philadelphia-based physician and a consultant for the American Cancer Society, in developing a group stress reduction class for cancer patients and survivors.

Deep Breathing

When you are under stress, you often inhale from your chest, which tends to be a more shallow and constricted way of breathing. Breathing deeply, inhaling from your abdomen instead of your chest, provides more oxygen to your bloodstream and can help you control your emotions and stay calm.

To start, place your hands over your belly and slowly breathe in through your nose. Feel your stomach expand, then slowly exhale. Do this 10 to 20 minutes a day.

Meditation

Meditation is a way to calm your body and mind by focusing your attention on one thing, such as a phrase, an object or your breathing. The most common way of meditating is to pick a word or phrase that you can say to yourself in coordination with your breathing. If you use a single word, repeat it when exhaling. If you are using a few words, try coordinating some of the words on the in breath and some on the out breath. It's ideal to mediate at least 10 to 20 minutes a day.

Imagery

Can you picture the way the seashore looked the last time you were there or imagine the smell of your mom's apple pie baking? If so, you can practice imagery, which is simply creating a mental picture or scene that can help soothe and relax you. What colors do you see? What sounds or scents are associated with this place? What is the temperature like? Try to use all of your senses to create a more vivid picture.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply focusing on the present moment, concentrating on the here-and-now. As you go to or from work, notice your surroundings, appreciate the look of the sky or the sound of a bird. While at work or at home, try to focus on the task or project at hand, without thinking about what you have to do in the next hour or next day. Take pleasure in simple things, like savoring a good meal or laughing with your family and friends. Try not to get distracted by what happened yesterday or what may happen tomorrow. Enjoy today.

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