

Healthy Habits

Tips and resources for living well



Reduce Stress this Spring

Life is full of stress, and if not properly managed, it can affect you physically as well as emotionally, causing potential issues such as headaches, insomnia, high blood pressure, depression and other serious health conditions.

Types of Stress

Stress can either be acute or chronic. Acute stress refers to a stressor in the moment like a fight with a friend, a project at work, or a lack of time to prepare dinner. Chronic stress occurs when a stressor is more pervasive such as marital or family troubles, ongoing problems at work, or money concerns.

Alleviate Stress

There are many ways to reduce your stress. Some of these include:

- **Exercise** – It helps release endorphins that can naturally help you feel better. It can also give you a break or time away from your stressor.
- **Deep breathing** – It can help to clear your mind and regain your composure.
- **Talking about it** – Talk through stressful moments with a friend, spouse, family member, professional or coworker. Holding it in can make stress worse.



Coping with Change

It can be moving to a new location, a divorce, receiving a serious diagnosis, dealing with the loss of a loved one or your child leaving the nest. No matter the reason, there are coping strategies that can help you throughout the event. Here are a few strategies to try:

Reframe your thoughts. For example, if your child is moving out, switch from focusing on your fears or loss. Instead, think about how your child is successfully growing into adulthood, poised for exciting opportunities ahead.

Change your reaction. It's the only part of change you can truly control! For example, if your spouse was recently laid off, rather than become angry about the loss of income, use the experience as a chance to re-evaluate life and affirm what matters most.

Seek support. Whether it is family, friends, coworkers or a support group, having people who you can rely on and talk to helps remind you that you're still the same worthy, capable person and you will make it through the change.



April is...National Stress Awareness Month

Can chronic stress cause depression?

Answer from Daniel K. Hall-Flavin, M.D.

Depression has many possible causes, such as genetics, brain chemicals and your life situation. Chronic stressful life situations can increase the risk of developing depression if you aren't coping with the stress well. There's also increasing evidence of links among poor coping, stress and physical illness.

Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to positive or negative situations in your life, such as a new job or the death of a loved one. Stress itself isn't abnormal or bad. What's important is how you deal with stress.

If you're having trouble coping, chronic stress can wear you down and overwhelm you. You may frequently be in a bad mood, your productivity may decrease, your relationships may suffer, you may develop sleep problems, and you might even find it difficult to go about your normal daily routine.

You can try some self-help stress relievers to get your stress under control, such as trying meditation or yoga, getting regular exercise, getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, or simply cutting back on your obligations. If your stress management efforts aren't helpful enough, see your doctor. If you've developed depression, you and your doctor can discuss treatment options.

How does stress affect my RA symptoms and what can I do about it?

Answer from April Chang-Miller, M.D.

Reducing stress in your daily life is an important part of your arthritis self-care because research suggests that stress can lead to RA symptom flares. Practicing one or two of the following simple techniques can help lower your stress and help keep RA pain, stiffness and fatigue at bay:

- **Breathe.** Sit in a quiet room, close your eyes and take some very slow deep breaths. Silently repeat positive words as you breathe in and out such as, "peace" and "calm." Once you're settled, imagine yourself relaxing in a beautiful place. Draw a picture in your mind of how it looks, feels, smells and sounds. Then spend the next few minutes on a private vacation.
- **Move around.** Even light physical activity like taking a walk can help relieve stress by reducing pain and improving your sleep. Gentle yoga and tai chi are also great ways to lower stress by connecting slow, flowing movement with deep breathing.
- **Share.** Find a good listener and tell that person about the things that cause you stress or worry. You may find it helpful to join a support group for people living with arthritis. Some people find a creative outlet helps relieve their stress, such as writing in a journal, painting, making pottery or doing needlework.
- **Prioritize.** Take a moment each morning or at night before you fall asleep to think through your "to do" list. What really has to get done? Do you have to do it yourself or can you ask someone else to handle it?

Talk to your doctor if you are feeling overwhelmed by stress and anxiety or if you'd like more ideas on ways to manage stress in your daily life