



## Good stress – it does exist!

It seems everyone is complaining about stress these days. It's true that too much stress can take its toll on our physical, mental and emotional health and interfere with our ability to function, but some stress is actually necessary. The key to making stress work for us begins with understanding the difference between good and bad stress.

### Good stress/bad stress

Good stress helps us meet challenges, become more resilient and reach our goals. Short bursts of stress energize and motivate us, help our minds focus, our senses sharpen and bodies get ready for physical challenges. Short bursts of stress may feel unpleasant but are essential in helping us meet deadlines, compete athletically, and cope with emergencies.

It's bad stress that causes problems. These tend to be longer-lasting and out of our control: job insecurity, a chronic illness, or caring for an elderly relative. Bad stress is when your mind and body are constantly flooded with stress hormones and never finds time to recover.

Stress may be unavoidable, but we can harness the power of short-term stress and control the negative effects of long-term stress.

### Coping with stress

Stress affects each of us differently and we all cope in our own way. Unfortunately, some people cope in unhealthy ways that can actually increase their stress and further damage their physical and mental health. These include:

- Consuming too much alcohol or caffeine.
- Overeating or undereating.
- Relying on prescription medication or illegal drugs.
- Smoking.

Let us help. Access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 by phone, web or mobile app.

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- Withdrawing from family, friends and activities.
- Avoiding dealing with problems.

If you're experiencing a stressful time, try the following:

- **Exercise.** Physical activity not only keeps your body and mind in shape, it's also a great stress-busting tool. Exercise helps to increase the production of endorphins – your body's feel-good chemicals. Working up a sweat will help you shed the day's stresses, elevate your mood and remain calm.
- **Stop and breathe.** If you're feeling too stressed, find ways to relax and refocus. This can include slow breathing exercises, meditation, massage, yoga, tai chi or even a long, warm bath.
- **Focus on your accomplishments.** There are always those weeks when everything goes wrong or you have too much to do. Turning bad stress into good stress means focusing on what you've accomplished, not what you've failed to do. Many people find it helpful to keep a gratitude journal in which they write down what they are thankful for every day, including their own talents and abilities.
- **Talk to a friend or family member.** Knowing that people have your best interests at heart can greatly reduce your stress levels. Your friends and family can help you put things into perspective and offer sound advice and support.
- **Laugh.** It's hard to feel anxious when you're laughing. Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins that give you a sense of well-being.
- **Set boundaries.** Many of us find it hard to say no and, as a result, find ourselves overwhelmed with work, family and social obligations. Setting boundaries is a skill that takes practice, so many experts suggest starting with small things, and building from there.
- **Take action.** Sometimes we increase our stress by fretting about a problem instead of doing something about it. For example, instead of worrying constantly about your finances, take action by consulting a financial advisor, talking to your bank or contacting your Employee Assistance Program for guidance.
- **Eat well.** No matter how stressed you are, try not to take solace in fast foods, highly processed meals or sugary, fatty treats. Instead, continue to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains.

Good stress that provides an opportunity to learn and grow will increase your effectiveness in all areas of your life. However, if you begin feel too much stress, talk to your doctor or contact your Employee Assistance Program.

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