

## APRIL PREVENTIVE HEALTH TOOLKIT

# Stress Awareness Month

Stress is a part of everyday life. It can be caused by any change in the environment that requires your body to react and respond. Both good and bad experiences, such as buying a house or losing a job, can provoke a stress response. If left unmanaged on a day-to-day basis, stress may lead to some serious health consequences.

Your body can cope with a certain amount of stress but, prolonged or continued exposure to it can be overwhelming. The most common type of stress is called acute stress. Acute stress is short-term and related to the day-to-day pressures you currently experience. Chronic stress, on the other hand, is persistent and it can take a toll on your mental and physical well-being if it isn't managed appropriately.

Learn more with the activities in this toolkit:

- **Health disparities**
- **What do you know about stress?**
- **Stress management basics**
- **Rapid stress relievers**
- **Stress vs. anxiety**
- **Resources**



**Around a third of adults (34%) reported that stress is completely overwhelming most days.** (Source: [APA](#))

**?** **Questions?**

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# Health disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in health among different social or racial groups. Health disparities are a complex and challenging problem across the world. Social factors play the largest role in shaping the overall health of communities. For example, having access to healthcare, a safe living environment, racial equity, nutritious food, quality education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all incredibly important to overall health.

People who face health disparities often have a higher risk for chronic stress. Stress affects everyone, but it disproportionately affects minority groups who face systemic inequities like racism, poverty, housing insecurity, and limited access to health resources.

## Did you know?

- In 2022, 75% of Black adults reported that the racial climate in the U.S. is a significant source of stress in their lives. (Source: [APA](#))
- Regardless of age at immigration, foreign-born women experience more depressive symptoms than native-born women during early adulthood. (Source: [APA](#))
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) individuals are at an increased risk for mental health issues compared to heterosexuals due to stigma resulting from perceived discrimination. (Source: [APA](#))
- Workplace stress has been reported to cause 120,000 deaths in the US each year. (Source: [OSHA](#))

For more information, please visit:

- [American Psychological Association: Stress in America 2022](#)
- [American Psychological Association: Fact Sheet](#)
- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration: Workplace Stress](#)

# What do you know about stress?

There are many misconceptions when it comes to identifying and managing stress. Fill out the trivia questions below, then check your answers on the following page to see how much you know about stress!

	True	False
1. The number one cause of stress in the United States is work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Some stress can be beneficial.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Stress is linked to six of the leading causes of death.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The best way to handle a stressful situation is to avoid it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Recognizing your body's response to stress is the first step in stress management.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Stress speeds up all your normal bodily functions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Sometimes, when a person experiences stress, there is no identifiable stressor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Stress management basics

The first step in stress-management is recognition. We all experience and respond to stress differently. When you're feeling stressed do you have trouble sleeping? Do you become angry or irritable? Do you find it difficult to focus, or experience headaches? Once you're able to identify your response to stress you can begin to manage it. Below are some general guidelines to follow that promote resilience and can reduce daily stress.

## Plan ahead

Set aside enough time to get the most important things done without having to rush. Use to-do lists to help you focus on your most important tasks, and approach big tasks one step at a time. Be realistic with your time to limit worrying about what won't get done.

## Take time to relax daily

Relaxation is more than just sitting down and watching TV. Relaxation should be intentional and focused on calming the tension in your body and mind. Some good forms of relaxation are:

- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Yoga or Tai Chi

## Eat well

Prioritize nourishing, whole foods and avoid heavily processed foods whenever possible. If you can, take time on weekends to prep healthy meals for the week, and always make sure to drink enough water.

## Engage in physical activity

When you're active, your body releases endorphins, which help reduce stress, ward off anxiety and depression, boost self-esteem, and improve sleep. If you're struggling to find time to exercise, try walking for just 5-10 minutes two or three times throughout the day.

## Get enough sleep

Try to get six to eight hours of sleep each night. If you can't sleep, take steps to help reduce stress by trying other stress management techniques. Change your routine so you can go to bed around the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.

## Create a support system

Spend time with positive people around you and connect with old friends and family. Spend time sharing your feelings, hopes, and concerns with them, and ask them to share theirs.

## Ask for help

If you're struggling to manage stress, even after trying some stress management techniques, consult with friends and family, join a support group, or consider speaking with your doctor.

1. **TRUE.** According to surveys, 40% of U.S. workers experience work stress and 25% say that work is the biggest source of stress in their lives.
2. **TRUE.** This is called eustress. Stress can have a positive effect, keeping us alert, motivated, and prepared to act.
3. **TRUE.** Heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide are all related to stress.
4. **FALSE.** The best way to handle stressful situations is to recognize and learn healthy ways to navigate through them.
5. **TRUE.** Many of us respond differently to stress. Some of these responses may not immediately be recognized as a response to stress.
6. **FALSE.** Stress slows down several major systems such as our digestive and immune systems. The diverted energy is then used to increase the supply of energy to our heart, lungs, muscles, and nervous system.

## Rapid stress relievers

Sometimes we are overwhelmed by unexpected stressors. When this happens, it's helpful to remember a few rapid stress relief techniques. Give the suggestions below a try the next time you encounter a stressful scenario.

- Slowly count to ten.
- Take three to five deep breaths.
- Walk away and make a plan to deal with the situation later calmly.
- Make a list of what can realistically get done that day.
- Find laughter by reading a joke or watching a funny video.
- Take a break to read or chat with a friend.
- Step outside and spend time in nature.
- Color or draw.

Coloring can be a healthy way to relive stress. It can help you be more mindful and focused on the present moment. Rather than dwell on a stressful workday, or a looming deadline, you can dedicate as much or as little time as you like to a creative distraction. There are countless free coloring pages available online. Use the image below to get started!



# Stress vs. anxiety

Stress is the physical or mental response to an external stressor, like worrying about an upcoming deadline, or the apprehension you might feel before a first date. Anxiety, on the other hand, is characterized by persistent and excessive worry that remains even in the absence of a stressor. If your stress or anxiety doesn't respond to the techniques above, consider talking to your doctor.

Stress	Both stress and anxiety	Anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally, is a response to an external cause, such as taking a big test or arguing with a friend.</li><li>• Goes away once the situation is resolved.</li><li>• Can be positive or negative. For example, it may inspire you to meet a deadline, or it may cause you to lose sleep.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both stress and anxiety can affect your mind and body. You may experience symptoms such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Excessive worry</li><li>○ Uneasiness</li><li>○ Tension</li><li>○ Headaches or body pain</li><li>○ High blood pressure</li><li>○ Loss of sleep</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generally, is internal, meaning it's your reaction to stress.</li><li>• Usually involves a persistent feeling of apprehension or dread that doesn't go away, and that interferes with how you live your life.</li><li>• Can be constant, even if there is no immediate threat.</li></ul>

(Source: [NIH](#))

## Resources

[APA: Stress in 2024](#)

[APA: What's the difference between stress and anxiety?](#)

[APA: Managing stress video toolkit](#)

[AHA: What is stress management?](#)

[ODPHP: Manage stress](#)

[NIH: Learn to manage stress](#)

[NIH: I'm so stressed out!](#)

[Mayo Clinic: Coloring is good for your health](#)