



# SCALE BACK ON STRESS

## The Weight of Stress

While the body has a natural stress-response system, long-term stress disrupts almost all the body's processes and puts you at increased risk for several health problems. From obesity to diabetes and heart disease, the prognosis for stress is serious and too heavy of a burden to ignore.

## Undress Stress

Don't let stress become the new normal! In the midst of stressful periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic, you can easily ignore or become oblivious to the warning signs of newly added layers of stress. Without acute awareness, bad habits, health issues, and added pounds can quickly accumulate and begin to tip the scale!

Hidden symptoms of stress could include:

### Emotional

- Becoming easily agitated and frustrated
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Having difficulty relaxing
- Feeling lonely, worthless, and depressed
- Avoiding others

### Physical

- Low energy
- Headaches
- Upset stomach, including diarrhea, constipation, and nausea
- Aches, pains, and tense muscles
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat
- Insomnia
- Frequent colds and infections
- Loss of sexual desire and/or ability
- Nervousness and shaking, ringing in the ear, cold or sweaty hands and feet
- Dry mouth and difficulty swallowing
- Clenched jaw and grinding teeth

### Cognitive

- Constant worrying
- Forgetfulness and disorganization
- Poor judgment
- Racing thoughts
- Inability to focus
- Being pessimistic

### Behavioral

- Changes in appetite -- either not eating or eating too much
- Procrastinating
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes
- Exhibiting more nervous behaviors, such as nail biting, fidgeting, and pacing

## Address Stress

Don't lose ground—lose the stress! Your health journey is too important to be derailed by stress! So now that you are armed with awareness, it's time to tackle the steps to reduce stress.

1. Make exercise a priority by incorporating it into your regular routine. Exercising is a critical component of both stress reduction and weight management.
2. Get adequate sleep. A lack of sleep can increase cortisol, appetite, and weight gain.
3. Eat healthier comfort foods. Stock your home with healthy options to grab during times of stress.
4. Set healthy resolutions and establish a "resolution partner."
5. Practice mindful eating. Removing distractions and focusing on what you are eating can help deter emotional triggers.
6. Keep a food journal. Monitor your food intake and gain control over your eating habits.
7. Drink more water. Thirst and hunger can be confused. Grab a glass of water as an initial go-to between meals.
8. Incorporate self-care and stress relief strategies into your daily life.

Scale back on stress today and look forward to a healthier tomorrow!

**INCLUSION MATTERS:** Stress impacts all of us at different points in our lives. Stress can be a positive thing, but it can also have a negative impact on your health. Stress can lead to weight loss, anxiety, depression, crying and much more. Stress can be caused by many different factors within our lives. For individuals with disabilities, stress can be triggered by the environment around you that causes frustration. These may include: lack of accessibility, unemployment due to the belief that you are unable to work, and lack of accessible gyms in your area. These things combined with other triggers for stress that we all face, it can become easy to live in a stress filled bubble. Here are a few ways to reduce stress:

- Make yourself a priority
- Create your own social support system
- Believe in yourself
- Eat healthy meals
- Take a break when necessary
- Deep breathing
- Exercise regularly
- Never apologize for advocating for yourself
- Develop a stress action plan
- Get enough sleep

**FAMILY MATTERS:** Even children can feel the weight of stress at times. It's important for adults not to minimize their stress. Identifying stress inducers can help your children understand what causes them to feel uneasy and to prevent it from affecting their emotions in the future. Time with friends, talking with their parents, and extracurricular activities are great outlets for helping kids lower stress levels.

## LINKS:

**Resources:** <https://www.nchpad.org/1664/6748/Stress-Awareness-in-the-Workplace>

**Making life work:** <https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/home-family/making-life-work-dealing-with-stress/>

**Can stress cause weight gain?:** <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/sleep-and-weight-loss>