

Managing stress

Stress causes your body to release hormones that prepare your body for the “fight or flight” response. The heart beats faster and the blood vessels get smaller to get more blood to the core of your body, rather than to the extremities (feet, hands). This response increases pressure on the heart and may lead to further damage.¹

Reducing stress reduces your blood pressure

Here are some things you can do to proactively reduce your stress levels¹:

- Give yourself time to get things done.
- Don't have too many items on your to-do list—delegate and learn to say “no” to requests.
- Recognize that some things are out of your control.
- Know your stress triggers and try to avoid them. For example, if rush-hour traffic is an issue for you, plan ahead so you don't have to drive in it.
- Make time for yourself—sit quietly, breathe deeply, and think of a peaceful scene.
- Take care of yourself emotionally and physically—seek out a support network that's encouraging and positive; engage in physical activity to reduce tension.
- Limit alcohol and avoid overeating or smoking.
- Enjoy the things you like to do. Living in the moment lets you really experience the things that bring you satisfaction.

Emergency stress stoppers

Sometimes you can't help but feel stressed. Here are some things you can do on the spot that may help lower your stress levels²:

- Count to 10 before you react.
- Take 3 to 5 deep breaths.
- Walk away from the situation and resolve to come back later to handle it.
- Take a walk.
- Break down big problems into small parts to make them easier to handle—take 1 step at a time.
- Give yourself positive self-talk (e.g., turn “I can't” into “I'll do my best”).
- Listen to music.

References: **1.** American Heart Association. Stress and blood pressure. http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/PreventionTreatmentofHighBloodPressure/Stress-and-Blood-Pressure_UCM_301883_Article.jsp. Updated August 14, 2014. Accessed September 1, 2015. **2.** American Heart Association. Four ways to deal with stress. http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/StressManagement/FourWaystoDealWithStress/Four-Ways-to-Deal-with-Stress_UCM_307996_Article.jsp. Updated July 15, 2014. Accessed September 1, 2015.

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