



Take Control of Your Stress and Stay Healthier

When you experience stress, your brain signals your body to sharpen its senses, increase the pulse, breathe deeper, and tense the muscles. You're ready to take action! If the stress is short-term, your body returns to equilibrium after the stress passes. Scientists have discovered, though, that if you're chronically stressed, the part of the brain that controls the stress response is constantly pumping out a lot of stress hormones. In situations of chronic stress, your immune cells are less able to respond to invading bacteria or a virus, making you more susceptible to sickness and disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), healthcare costs are nearly 50% greater for employees who report

high levels of stress. It's now widely believed that job stress increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, certain psychological disorders, and musculoskeletal disorders of the back and upper extremities. Stress may also worsen existing health problems and interfere with their treatment. Personal factors (e.g., family problems, inadequate sleep, unhealthy diet, or inactivity) can also increase the risk of stress-related health problems.

People with high-levels of short-term stress or chronic stress have a prolonged healing time, a decreased ability of their immune systems to respond to vaccination, and an increased susceptibility to viral infections like the common cold, according to NIH researcher Esther Sternberg, MD. "If you're too stressed, your performance falls off," she says, and you are more susceptible to disease. "But your goal should be to try to learn to control your

stress to make it work for you," Dr. Sternberg says. "Don't just think of getting rid of your stress – think of turning it to your advantage."

- Identify what causes you stress (e.g., marital problems, conflict at work, illness in the family).
- Take action! If something can be solved, take control and solve it! Ask for help from your boss or your spouse, if needed, to make positive changes.
- Take a time-out. If you feel stressed, give yourself a break. Allow some down time, even if it is only a 30-second time-out.
- Manage your time wisely. Learn how to be organized and to not procrastinate.
- Decide what is important to you, and say "No" to commitments that don't fit your priorities.

National Institutes of Health & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Continued on page 2

How to Improve Your Quality of Life

Everyone wants to enjoy life. A new study has identified the two lifestyle practices that erode quality of life more than anything else: excessive body weight and smoking. Researchers looked at individuals who already had health problems, such as diabetes or coronary heart disease. After adjusting for any diseases they had, in most cases obesity was a more significant factor in decreased quality of life than their original health problem.

In another study, researchers focused on quality of life and activity levels in a group of 430 sedentary women who were all overweight and had elevated blood pressure. A third of the women reported a history of depression and 18% were currently taking medication for depression.

The women were randomly divided into 4 groups. One group (the control group) made no changes to their activity levels, but the women in the other 3 groups

increased their activity levels by 1.5 hours per week, 2.25 hours per week, and 3 hours or more of physical activity per week. After 6 months, all of the women in the activity groups showed improvement in quality-of-life measures, including physical health, social health, and mental health. The more active they were, the more they improved – whether they lost weight or not. Those women in the control group (inactive) had no improvement in their quality of life.

If you want to feel good and enjoy life, you need to live healthfully: Avoid smoking, be physically active (the greater the activity, the greater the improvement), eat well, and maintain a healthy weight. These are key factors for enjoying a high quality of life – both physically and mentally.

*American Heart Journal. Feb. 2010.
Archives of Internal Medicine. Feb. 2009.*



Prevent Low Back Pain

Low back pain is the second most common cause of disability in the United States – and it's on the rise. A recent survey found that in the last 14 years, the prevalence of low back pain has more than doubled. Why?

- ▶ **Increasing rates of obesity.** Obesity puts additional strain on the back and limits physical activity, which is needed for maintaining strong stomach and back muscles.
- ▶ **Changes in work life.** Today, most people in the workforce sit through the day, which can be hard on the back.
- ▶ **Decreased fitness levels** in the general population.
- ▶ **Increased rates of depression.** One study showed that people who developed depression were 3 times more likely to develop chronic back pain in the next 2 years than those without depression.

Maintaining a healthy weight and getting regular physical activity, such as walking or swimming daily coupled with strength training, can help improve your back health.

Archives of Internal Medicine. Feb. 2009.

Here are some tips for preventing back pain, offered by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

How to Lift

- ✓ Don't lift by bending over. Lift an object by bending your knees and squatting to pick up the object. Keep your back straight and hold the object close to your body. Avoid twisting your body while lifting.
- ✓ Push rather than pull when you need to move heavy objects.



How to Sit

- ✓ Sit in chairs with straight backs or low-back support. Keep your knees a little higher than your hips. Adjust the seat or use a low stool to prop your feet on. Turn by moving your whole body rather than by twisting at the waist.
- ✓ When driving, sit straight and move the seat forward. This helps you not lean forward to reach the controls. You may want to put a small pillow or rolled towel behind your lower back if you must drive or sit for a long time.



- ✓ If you must sit at your desk or at the wheel of a car or truck for long hours, break up the time with stops to stretch.

How to Stand

- ✓ If you must stand for long periods, rest 1 foot on a low stool to relieve pressure on your lower back. Every 5 to 15 minutes, switch the foot you're resting on the stool. Maintain good posture: Keep your ears, shoulders and hips in a straight line, with your head up and your stomach pulled in.
- ✓ Wear flat shoes or shoes with low heels (1 inch or lower).



How to Sleep

- ✓ The best way to sleep is on your side with your knees bent. You can put a pillow under your head to support your neck. You can also put a pillow between your knees.
- ✓ If you sleep on your back, put pillows under your knees and a small pillow under your lower back. Don't sleep on your stomach unless you put a pillow under your hips.

American Academy of Family Physicians. 2010.

Everyday Ways to Manage Stress (continued from page 1)

- Stay active. Go for a walk, run, or bike ride.
- Eat well. Eating regular meals and taking time to enjoy them will make you feel better. (Nope. Eating in the car on the way to work doesn't count!)
- Laugh! It can make you feel good — and that good feeling can stay with you even after the laughter stops.
- Get involved. Get involved in activities that support your community. It can help put your own problems into perspective.
- Get plenty of sleep. Fatigue and stress usually go hand in hand. Aim for 7-8 hours daily.
- Keep connected. Stay around people who are caring and positive.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol may seem to help with the stress temporarily. But in the long run they create additional problems that compound the stress you are already feeling.
- Don't sweat the small stuff! Pick a few really important things and let the rest slide.
- Journal. Write things down to get them off of your chest.
- Find support. Ask for help from a health professional, your pastor, or your boss. Join a support group.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ASK THE WELLNESS DOCTOR

Q: I am a plump 63-year-old woman. It doesn't seem to matter how much I starve myself. My weight stays the same. Do you have any suggestions?

A: Go to www.wellsource.info/wn/ask-postmenopauseWeight.pdf to read the answer from Don Hall, DrPH, CHES.

To ask your question, email: paulaw@wellsource.com, subject line: Ask the Wellness Doctor. Emails with any other subject line will be directed to the spam folder.

Health Challenge: "Be Smoke Free" available at: www.wellsource.info/wn/hc-SmokeFree.pdf. Make it a priority to avoid all secondhand smoke. If you smoke, make a plan and quit smoking this month.

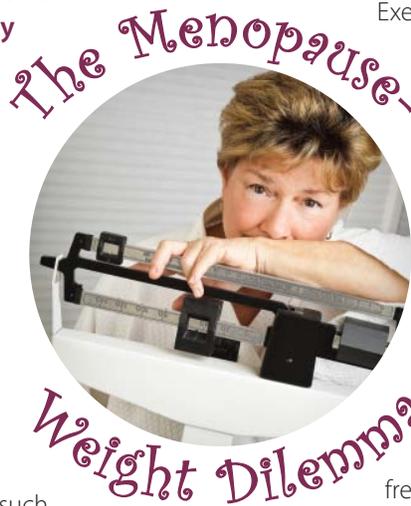
Q. I am a plump 63-year-old woman. I have carried extra pounds for a number of years now. It doesn't matter how much I starve myself, my weight stays the same. I try to walk at least two miles almost every day, and try to eat reasonably, but I can't lose weight. Please help!

A. As women approach menopause, they often find themselves experiencing unexplained weight gain – especially around the waists and hips – despite their attempts keep the weight off. Post-menopausal women can gain 10-20 pounds. But that doesn't mean that it's healthy. Before you start a weight-loss program, talk to your doctor. There might be an underlying health issue, such as insulin resistance or hypothyroidism, which is contributing to your weight gain. Once your doctor rules out any health condition as a cause for your weight gain, you're ready to start developing healthy habits that will help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight for life!

The best way to lose weight, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is to follow a healthy eating plan and be active. It sounds like you are off to a good start by walking 2 miles on most days. Many people have found that it takes 60 minutes or more of physical activity most days of the week to see results. The National Weight Control Registry found that the majority of people who have lost weight and kept it off:

- Exercise on average about 1 hour each day
- Eat breakfast every day
- Weigh themselves at least once a week
- Watch less than 10 hours of TV per week

You may want to increase the amount of exercise you do each day to at least 60 minutes. It doesn't have to be continuous. For example, try walking 2 miles in the morning, a mile during a break from work, and a mile or 2 after dinner.



Exercise is helpful and has independent health benefits, but by itself will not usually result in significant weight loss unless it is in large amounts. You must eat fewer calories than you use to lose weight. An average woman your age may need about 1,800 calories a day to maintain weight. To lose weight, 500 calories less a day would be about 1,300 calories a day. That would be a good goal.

However, skipping meals, starving yourself, or going on a "diet" is not the way to lose weight. Instead, eat a healthy breakfast daily (including whole grains and fresh fruits) and choose mostly unrefined foods.

Be sure to eliminate empty calories, including all soft drinks or sweetened juices, sweets, most visible fats, and all "white" grains (white bread and rolls, refined cereals, white rice, etc.). Use whole grains instead. Aim for 25-30 grams of fiber daily. Eat lots of vegetables, whole grains, fresh fruit, soups and salads (light on dressing). On 1,300 calories a day, you will lose weight, about 1 pound a week on the average, if you continue to exercise.

You might benefit from joining a safe weight-loss program. Look for one that:

- Sets a goal of slow and steady weight loss – 1/2 to 2 pounds per week
- Offers low-calorie eating plans with a wide range of healthy, unrefined foods
- Encourages you to be more physically active
- Teaches you about healthy eating and physical activity
- Adapts to your likes and dislikes

Losing weight will take some effort. It's best to adopt healthy lifestyle habits rather than to do something temporary (i.e., "...until I lose weight"). You'll find you will be fitter and will feel better.



Be Smoke-Free This Month

CHALLENGE
Avoid
Secondhand
Smoke. If You
Smoke, Quit.

Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Make it a priority to avoid all secondhand smoke.
2. If you smoke, keep a written record of how many cigarettes, cigars, and/or pipes you smoke each day.
3. If you don't smoke and are never around secondhand smoke, share the information in this Health Challenge™ with at least 2 other people this month.
4. Read "What Is Secondhand Smoke?" and "What if You Smoke?"
5. To complete the Challenge, you must avoid secondhand smoke on at least 22 days this month. If you smoke, do not smoke for at least 22 days this month – preferably the last 22.
6. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

What Is Secondhand Smoke?

Secondhand smoke is the smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar, or smoke exhaled by the smoker. It is a complex mixture of over 4,000 compounds, more than 60 of which cause cancer. Exposure to secondhand smoke is often called *passive smoking* or *involuntary smoking*.

The danger from passive smoking is as high as one-third that of actively smoking. According to the American Lung Association, secondhand smoke:

- Causes 3,400 deaths each year from lung cancer in nonsmokers
- Causes eye, nose, throat, and lung irritation, leading to coughing and chest discomfort
- Causes an average of 46,000 deaths per year from heart disease in nonsmokers
- Increases health hazards for unborn children, sudden infant deaths, and allergy and respiratory infections in young children
- Causes 30% increased risk of lung cancer to non-smoking spouses

To protect yourself and your loved ones from secondhand smoke:

- Don't let people smoke in your home or car. If someone absolutely must smoke, politely ask them to do so outside – away from windows and doors.
- Choose restaurants, hotels, and rental cars that are smoke-free.
- Sit in nonsmoking sections of airports, shopping malls, stadiums, and other public areas.
- If you are in an environment where people are smoking – and you cannot leave – open windows or use exhaust fans to help send the smoke outside.
- Ask your employer to make sure you do not have to breathe other people's smoke at work.
- If family members smoke, ask them to quit.

Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke claims an estimated 438,000 American lives each year.

What if You Smoke?

- Smoking causes 1 in 5 deaths and millions of illnesses every year in the United States.
- Cigarette smoking is related to increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and lung cancer.
- Cigars contain the same addictive, toxic, and carcinogenic compounds found in cigarettes. In fact, a single large cigar can contain as much tobacco as an entire pack of cigarettes.

Research shows that stopping makes a significant difference. Consider the health advantages of quitting:

Personal health. Your blood pressure will drop, circulation will improve, and lung function will increase. Your risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer of the lung, mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, cervix, and pancreas will decrease. You'll have healthier bones, and be sick less often.

Appearance. Your breath will be fresher. Your teeth will not be as stained. You'll smell better.

Money. You'll not only save money by not buying cigarettes (figure it out, the number of packs/day times 365 days a year). You'll also save on insurance and medical expenses.





Longevity. You can live as many as 8.5 years longer to enjoy your grandchildren.

Sexuality. Quitting smoking decreases the risk of impotence.

Fire safety. You'll reduce your risk of starting a house fire. More people die from fires started by smoking materials than any other type of fire.

Other's health. Your loved ones will breathe easier. You'll also be a good example as a nonsmoker.

- **At 20 minutes after quitting,** blood pressure decreases, and pulse rate drops.
- **At 12 hours,** carbon monoxide level in blood drops to normal, and oxygen level in blood increases to normal.
- **At 24 hours,** chance of a heart attack decreases.
- **At 48 hours,** nerve endings start to regrow, and ability to smell and taste is enhanced.
- **At 2 weeks to 3 months,** circulation improves, walking becomes easier, and lung function increases.
- **At 1 to 9 months,** coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease.
- **At 1 year,** excess risk of coronary heart disease is decreased to half that of a smoker.
- **At 5 to 15 years** after quitting, stroke risk is reduced to that of people who have never smoked.
- **At 10 years,** risk of lung cancer drops to as little as one-half that of continuing smokers. Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases, and risk of ulcer decreases.
- **At 15 years,** risk of coronary heart disease and risk of death returns to nearly the level of people who have never smoked.

Steps to Successful Quitting

Most smokers (about 70%) want to quit, and half of them try each year. Millions of Americans have stopped smoking. If they did it, you can too!

Write down why you want to quit (e.g., health concerns, family, improved fitness). Review these reasons daily when first quitting.

Get help and support from your doctor. Most people who have stopped tried several times before being successful. If you didn't make it on your last try, don't get discouraged. This time may be your successful attempt. New treatments and medications are available that can more than double your chances of quitting successfully.

Set a quit date. This should be within 2 weeks of the time you visit your doctor. Tell your family, friends, and coworkers your plans and your quit date, and ask for their understanding and support. Ask other smokers in your house and office not to smoke in your presence.

Anticipate roadblocks and plan how to handle them, such as coping with withdrawal symptoms (e.g., using nicotine replacement therapy), and fear of weight gain (e.g., replace smoking with an active lifestyle). Keep busy in the evening and on weekends with activities you enjoy.

Prepare your environment. Remove all tobacco products from your home and work. Avoid smoking in places where you spend a lot of time (your office, home, or car.) Have your teeth cleaned the week you stop. Keep major deadlines and pressures at a minimum the first 2 weeks after you quit.

Make a "survival kit," including chewing gum, tooth picks to hold in your mouth, carrot sticks and celery, and mints or red-hot candies. Keep you fingers busy with a pencil, rubber band, or a rubber squeeze ball.

On your quit date, STOP! It's best to quit cold turkey, not even one puff after the quit date. Should you slip and smoke a cigarette, don't give up. Make tomorrow a smoke-free day.

Avoid alcohol, since alcohol reduces your resolve to quit. If you want to smoke every time you have a cup of coffee, you may want to try another hot drink.

Get social support. Join a stop-smoking class or group. Find someone you can call and talk to when smoking urges get really strong.

Start a list of personal benefits you receive from stopping (e.g., feel better about yourself, less winded when exercising). Add to the list whenever you can.

Reward your progress. Set short- and long-term goals and rewards. For example, if you stop for a week, buy a new outfit or CD. When you've remained stopped for 6 months, take a special vacation.

Follow up with your doctor. Visit your doctor during your first week of stopping, and then again a month after stopping. Discuss any difficulties you are having.

Plan for long-term success. Replace smoking with other activities. Many people go back to smoking if they are discouraged, so plan what you would do if you have a crisis in your life. Continue your commitment to a healthier you.



Need more help? Smokefree.gov provides free, accurate, evidence-based information and professional assistance to help support the immediate and long-term needs of people trying to quit smoking.

Sources: Secondhand Smoke Exposure and Cardiovascular Effects. Institute of Medicine, 2009. American Lung Association, 2007. Environmental Protection Agency, 2007. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009. American Heart Association, 2009. American Cancer Society, 2009.





Be Smoke-Free This Month

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record your smoking/nonsmoking each day. If you smoke one day, start being smoke-free again the next day. Mark each day you avoid secondhand smoke.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you were smoke-free. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. If you are already smoke-free, write down the first names of the people you shared this information with.
4. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

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MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC ☐ ex. min. _____							
HC ☐ ex. min. _____							
HC ☐ ex. min. _____							
HC ☐ ex. min. _____							
HC ☐ ex. min. _____							

_____ Number of days I was smoke-free this month

First names of people I shared this information with: _____ and _____

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

 Name _____ Date _____

