

The stressors of stress on your body and behavior

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Stress symptoms may be affecting your health, even though you might not realize it. You may think illness is to blame for that irritating headache, your frequent insomnia or your decreased productivity at work. But stress may actually be the cause. This article is written by Mayo Clinic Staff.

Common effects of stress

Indeed, [stress symptoms](#) can affect your body, your thoughts and feelings, and your behavior. Being able to recognize common stress symptoms can help you manage them. Stress that's left unchecked can contribute to many [health problems](#), such as [high blood pressure](#), [heart disease](#), obesity and diabetes.

- On your body: Headache, muscle tension or pain, chest pain, fatigue, change in sex drive, stomach upset, sleep problems
- On your mood: Anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation or focus, feeling overwhelmed, irritability or anger, sadness or depression
- On your behavior: Overeating or

undereating, angry outbursts, drug or alcohol misuse, tobacco use, social withdrawal, exercising less often

Act to manage stress

If you have stress symptoms, taking steps to manage your stress can have many health benefits. Explore stress management strategies, such as:

- Getting regular physical activity
- Practicing relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, tai chi or massage
- Keeping a sense of humor
- Spending time with family and friends
- Setting aside time for hobbies, such as reading a book or listening to music

Aim to find active ways to manage your stress. Inactive ways to manage stress—such as watching television, surfing the internet or playing video games—may seem relaxing, but they may increase your stress over the long term.

And be sure to get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy, balanced diet. Avoid tobacco use, excess caffeine and alcohol, and the use of illegal substances.

When to seek help

If you're not sure if stress is the cause or if you've taken steps to control your stress but your symptoms continue, see your doctor. Your [healthcare provider](#) may want to check for other potential causes. Or consider seeing a professional counselor or therapist, who can help you identify sources of your stress and learn new coping tools.

Also, get emergency help immediately if you have [chest pain](#), especially if you also have shortness of breath, jaw or back pain, pain radiating into your shoulder and arm, sweating, dizziness, or nausea.

These may be warning signs of a heart attack and not simply stress symptoms.

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