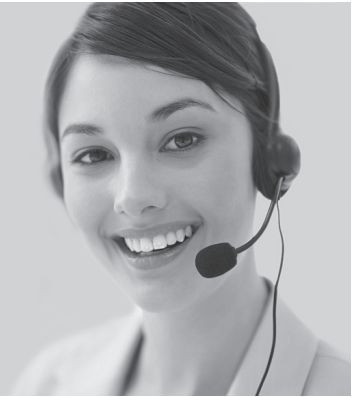


“It was great to talk with you.

Thank you for your interest in ‘Stress and Your Blood Pressure.’
I hope you find this tip sheet helpful.

Please give me a call if you have more questions about this or other topics.

As your health coach, I’m ready to help in any way I can.”



Stress can raise your blood pressure and damage your health. Learning some healthy ways to cope with stress can help you lower your blood pressure. It can also help you feel better and improve your health overall.

Under stress, your body produces a surge of “fight or flight” hormones. This narrows the diameter of the blood vessels, decreasing the space in which the blood travels. When a liquid is squeezed into a smaller space, the pressure goes up. In this case, the blood pressure goes up.

When the stressful situation is over, your blood pressure will return to normal. But under chronic stress, your blood pressure spikes over and over. This damages your blood vessels, heart, and kidneys, just like chronic high blood pressure does.

Also, when you’re under stress, you may overeat. You may eat unhealthy foods. Or you may be less active, smoke, or drink too much alcohol. These unhealthy ways of coping with stress put you more at risk for high blood pressure.

You can learn healthy ways to cope with stress, which can help prevent a rise in your stress hormones and blood pressure.

Ways to Reduce Stress

With planning, you can avoid some sources of stress. For example:

- Get enough sleep. When you’re rested, you’re better able to handle daily life and stay on track with a healthy lifestyle. Also, research suggests that the lack of enough good sleep is related to the development of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.



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- Don't pack your schedule. Make time for the things that really matter to you. Include time for breaks and exercise. Say "No, thanks" to other things when you can. Also, leave some "breathing room" for what might happen that you don't expect.
- Ask for help. Share some of your work with others. No one can do it all.
- Take some time to organize your life. Use a calendar. Put things at home and at work in order. Then set aside a little time every day to keep things in order.
- Stay in touch with friends and family. Knowing you're not alone helps smooth out the ups and downs in life.
- Set goals you can reach. Don't expect too much of yourself.
- Don't let problems fester. Talk with your health coach about problem solving steps you can use.
- Think of all the good things in your life. Let the small things that annoy you "roll off your shoulders" when you can.
- Plan ahead. Think about the times that could be stressful for you. Plan for how to handle them or work around them.
- Reach out to people who can help support you in meeting your goals. A good place to start is with your health coach.
- Remember to laugh about things.

When You Can't Avoid Stress

When, despite your best efforts, stress steps in:

- Catch yourself feeling stressed as early as you can.
- Take a 10-minute "time out."
- Move your body, such as by walking or stretching. Being active reduces stress. It is also a proven way to lower blood pressure. Whenever you can, even if for a few minutes, take a walk. It's a great stress buster!
- Pamper yourself. Take 10 minutes just for yourself. Do something you want to do.
- Learn to do "belly breathing" to breathe away your stress.
- Use positive self talk such as, "I can do this," or "things will work out."
- Don't be afraid to say, "I'm sorry" if you made a mistake.
- Break down big problems into smaller ones.
- Set your watch ahead by 10 minutes to avoid being late.
- Drive in the slower lane.
- Smile at your neighbor.



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- Find pleasure in things you enjoy such as crafts, hobbies, music, exercise, books, TV, card games, board games, etc.
- Try relaxation techniques such as medication, yoga, or Tai Chi.

Breathe Away Your Stress

Good breathing habits can quiet your mind and relax your body. Good breathing is called “belly breathing.” When you belly breathe, your breaths are slow and deep. They raise your abdomen, not your chest. This is how a newborn baby and sleeping adults breathe.

To learn belly breathing:

1. Lie down on your back. Bend your knees, with your feet on the floor about 8 inches apart. Make sure your spine is straight. (You can also learn belly breathing sitting down with arms and legs uncrossed.)
2. Take a few minutes to do a brief “body scan.” This will help you notice the benefit of belly breathing. Focus on each part of your body, one part at a time. Start with your toes and move up. Notice where there is any tension. Tighten the muscles in that area slightly so you are aware of it. Hold the tension for a moment. Then let go and relax.
3. Now put one hand on your belly. Put the other hand on your chest. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. As you breathe out through your nose, feel the hand on your belly drop. Let your belly push your hand back up as you breathe in. Let your chest move just a little as you breathe.
4. When your breath has shifted from your chest to your belly, relax your arms at your side. Continue belly breathing.

After several minutes of belly breathing, do another body scan. Do you feel less tension in your body? Yes No

Now you know how to belly breathe and how it feels in your body. Make belly breathing a way of life. Whenever you feel tense, stressed, or in a state of craving, check in to your breath.



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Are you breathing from your chest? If so, drop your breath down into your abdomen. Check your breathing often during the day. Shift to belly breathing as needed.

Managing Your Blood Pressure May Cause Stress

Making lifestyle changes to improve your blood pressure is not easy. It takes time and effort. And it may cause stress. Here are some healthy ways to manage stress that may come from making lifestyle changes:

Possible source of stress	Healthy ways to manage it
Extra time is needed to shop for food and prepare it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your spouse to help food shop. • Make double recipes. Freeze part for later.
You feel deprived when you can't eat your favorite foods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow yourself to have favorite foods in small amounts now and then. • Remind yourself of how important it is to you to maintain your good health.
You feel upset if your family doesn't like foods that are lower in sodium and fat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your family to support your efforts to try new foods. They will benefit from eating healthier. • Discuss with your family your feelings and your commitment to taking care of your blood pressure. Brainstorm options with them. Try some.
You feel uneasy at social events where there are foods that are high in sodium and fat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say, "No, thank you" to events that aren't important to you. • Call the host or hostess ahead of time. Ask what will be served and whether you can bring a dish that's low in sodium and fat. • Before you go to a party, plan what foods you will and will not choose.
You feel stressed about how to fit being active into your busy schedule.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an appointment to be active. • Be active while you are doing other things you plan to do. Hold a walking meeting or go hiking with your family on vacation. Walk around the playing field when you take your child to a sporting event or practice.

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Sources:

- American Heart Association (2016). Managing Stress to Control High Blood Pressure. Retrieved from: www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HighBloodPressure/MakeChangesThatMatter/Managing-Stress-to-Control-High-Blood-Pressure_UCM_301883_Article.jsp#.WXeCaYTyu71



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