

Are You Feeling Stressed?

Take a deep breath and find out more.

Rona Renner, RN

Are there some days when you have too much to do? Perhaps you don't stop to eat, you become irritated, and yell at your children for no reason. You may be experiencing too much stress. If so, you're not alone.

We've all experienced stress, and know how it feels when there are too many demands from work, school, family members, or life circumstances.

Stress is a natural reaction to physical and emotional pressures. It's a way we sometimes respond and react to challenges that come our way, like a new task at work, a test, or preparing to move to a new house.

Stress can cause physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, and increased blood pressure. It can also cause anxiety, depression, trouble sleeping, anger and aggression. When children are under stress they may show some of the same symptoms, and they may find it hard to concentrate in school or at home. Teenagers and adults may respond to stress by drinking too much, smoking, overeating, or doing drugs. These ways of coping all have negative consequences

There are healthy ways to deal with stress that can make a big difference to you and your family:

- **Evaluate your schedule.** If you're doing too much, cut out some activities and notice what's most important to you and your family. Plan for some "down time."
- **Get enough rest and sleep.** Sleep helps you stay healthy and feel re-energized. The recommendation for adults is to get eight hours of sleep a night - but keep in mind that individual needs will vary.
- **Discover ways to relax,** such as reading a book, taking a walk, listening to music, or taking a bath. If you're at work and are limited in what you can do, try this for 5 minutes: sit at your desk, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, relax any part of your body that feels tense, like your shoulders and neck. Let your mind think of places, people, or things, that make you feel comfortable and happy.
- **Get regular exercise.** It can be a walk during lunch, gardening, bike riding, playing ball, or dancing with your children.
- **Eat well, and don't skip meals.** If you find that you eat more when you're under stress, avoid junk food, and find healthy alternatives.
- **Make a list and prioritize the things you have to do.** Try to get something done each day, and cross it off of your list. Use a calendar and appointment book to help with organization.
- **Write your feelings in a journal or draw a picture** as a way to learn more about what you are dealing with and express your emotions.
- **Get help from friends, family, or professionals.** Attend a stress management class, parenting class, see a counselor, or talk with your doctor or minister.

Stress is a normal part of life. Recognize it, reduce it, and relax!

