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Five Things You Should Know About Stress



There are different types of stress—all of which carry physical and mental health risks. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can be an occurrence that keeps happening over a long period of time.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time, but what is stress? How does it affect your health, and what can you do about it?

Stress is how the brain and body respond to any demand. Every type of demand or stressor—such as exercise, work, school, major life changes, or traumatic events—can be stressful.

Stress can affect your health. It is important to pay attention to how you deal with minor and major stress events so that you know when to seek help. Here are five things you should know about stress:

1. Stress affects everyone.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively or recover from stressful events more quickly than others. There are different types of stress—all of which carry physical and mental health risks. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can be an occurrence that keeps happening over a long period of time.

Examples of stress include

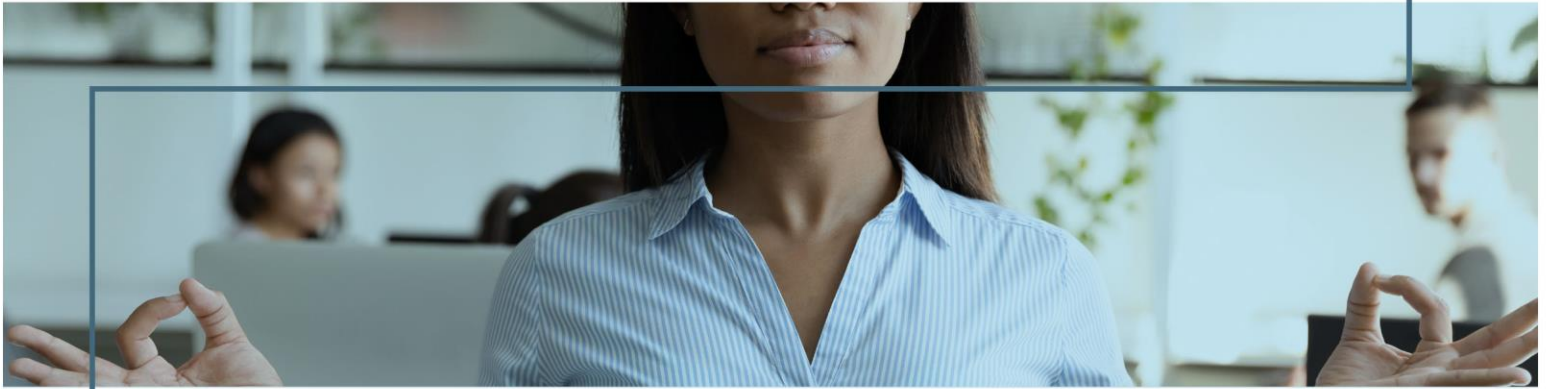
- Routine stress related to the pressures of work, school, family, and other daily responsibilities
- Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness
- Traumatic stress experienced in an event like a major accident, war, assault, or natural disaster where people may be in danger of being seriously hurt or killed (People who experience traumatic stress often experience temporary symptoms of mental illness, but most recover naturally soon after.)

2. Not all stress is bad.

Stress can motivate people to prepare or perform, like when they need to take a test or interview for a new job. Stress can even be life-saving in some situations. In response to danger, your body prepares to face a threat or flee to safety.

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In these situations, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, and your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival.

3. Long-term stress can harm your health.

Health problems can occur if the stress response goes on for too long or becomes chronic, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided. With chronic stress, those same life-saving responses in your body can suppress immune, digestive, sleep, and reproductive systems, which may cause them to stop working normally.

Different people may feel stress in different ways. For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, sadness, anger, or irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold.

Routine stress may be the hardest type of stress to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may contribute to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other illnesses, as well as mental health problems like depression or anxiety.

4. There are ways to manage stress.

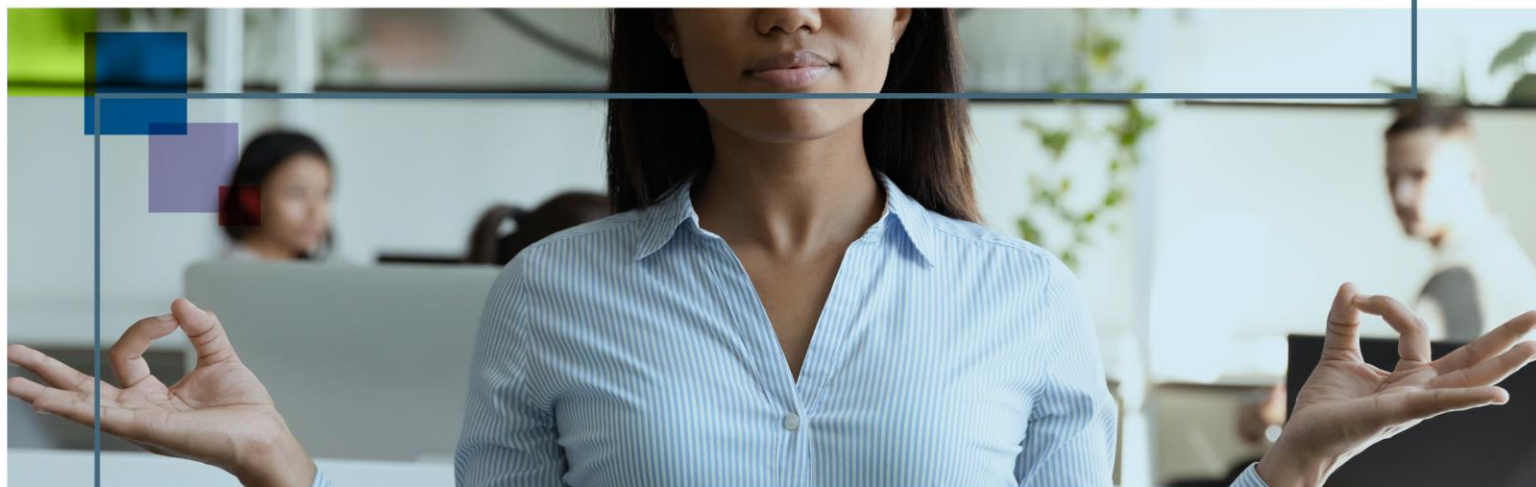
The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to manage your stress can reduce or

prevent these effects. The following are some tips that may help you to cope with stress:

- **Recognize the signs** of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- **Talk to your doctor or health care provider.** Get proper health care for existing or new health problems.
- **Get regular exercise.** Just 30 minutes per day of walking can help boost your mood and reduce stress.
- **Try a relaxing activity.** Explore stress-coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises. For some stress-related conditions, these approaches are used in addition to other forms of treatment. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy and relaxing activities. Learn more about these techniques on the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) website at <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>.
- **Set goals and priorities.** Decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say *no* to new tasks if they are putting you into overload. Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.

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- **Stay connected** with people who can provide emotional and other support. To reduce stress, ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations.
- **Consider a clinical trial.** Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), NCCIH, and other research facilities across the country are studying the causes and effects of psychological stress, and stress management techniques. You can learn more about studies that are recruiting by visiting <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/labs-at-nimh/join-a-study/index.shtml> or <https://clinicaltrials.gov> (keyword: *stress*).

5. If you're overwhelmed by stress, ask for help from a health professional.

You should seek help right away if you have suicidal thoughts, are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope. Your doctor may be able to provide a recommendation. You can find resources to help you find a mental health provider by visiting <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>.

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Anyone experiencing severe or long-term, unrelenting stress can become overwhelmed. If you or a loved one is having thoughts of suicide, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The service is available to anyone. All calls are confidential.

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). *Five things you should know about stress* (NIH Pub. No. OM 16-4310). Retrieved July 15, 2019, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>



Making the Most of Small Talk

It's very easy to minimize the importance of small talk. To the people who are good at initiating casual conversations and connecting with others, it's second nature and automatically part of life. But to the rest of us, social situations and one-on-one encounters can leave us feeling completely ill-equipped. Let's face it: The ability to meet and greet and make people comfortable does make a big difference. Why? Because we live in a land of first impressions and we don't always get a second chance. So even if "expert chitchat" isn't on the top of your resume, here are some ways of handling a challenge that could open doors.

Names come first.

It might sound obvious, but it's rule number one: the simplest way to approach someone is to introduce yourself, by name. Forget about coming up with a witty opener. Stick with: "Hi, I'm ____" (Or if you're in a formal mood: "Hello, my name is ____") Whatever the occasion or greeting, start by putting your name out there. This is true even if you've met the person before, or are pretty sure they know who you are. Don't assume. Reintroduce yourself. It never hurts.

Your second step is to get the other person's name. Again, this may strike you as a no-brainer, but it's the little things that slip our minds when we're uncomfortable—which is why people can forget to offer their name in response to an introduction. So if a prompt is necessary, go ahead: "And you are ____?"

After learning the person's name, repeat it out loud. This trick is pretty much guaranteed to help you remember names. If you can, try to fit the name into the conversation later, to reinforce it.

Looks do count.

We're not talking physical appearance here; we're talking eye contact and the awareness of physicality. It's essential that you look the other person in the eye while talking. This doesn't mean staring, it means directly facing them, engaging their focus, and staying connected—not allowing your eyes to wander off mid-sentence or roam around the room when listening.

Also, a firm handshake should generally accompany an introduction for both men and women. In most cases, the physical act can start to break down psychological barriers. Then, during the conversation, make yourself available by giving the other person your full attention. Stay aware of your own body language, and pick up clues from theirs.

It's not about you.

OK. This is really the number one small talk rule: Don't talk so much as listen. As much as you're able, let the other person do the talking by asking questions. Given encouragement, most people are quite willing to share information about themselves, and express their opinions. So rather than bringing up topics that allow you to impress someone with your expertise, turn it around.

Find out about their interests, likes, dislikes, and experiences. Ask questions that are open-ended and lead to other questions. When you discover common ground and start to tell the story about the time when you got in trouble as a kid—catch yourself.

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Making the Most of Small Talk (Contd.,)

Keep your contribution short and sweet, and bring it back to them.

Of course, this works a lot better if you're genuinely interested. But more often than not people are genuinely interesting, especially when they feel appreciated. Listening, really listening, not just biding time and scanning the room for someone better to talk to, takes practice, but it's a skill worth developing.

Keep things light.

When venturing into a group of strangers or meeting someone for the first time, many people dread the prospect of small talk, or dismiss it as meaningless and boring. "Why waste my time?" is a question on some serious minds (along with "What am I going to talk about?"). But small talk does have a purpose in our society. Keeping things light and casual actually gives us more information about who someone is and how they live their lives than intense debates which are burdened by the weight of the world's problems.

Talk about the weather, entertainment, books, current events, sports, hobbies, or what you love and hate about your jobs. Compliment the other person if the compliment is sincere, and not inappropriate for the situation. Why not offer to buy someone a cup of coffee? It's common courtesy. Stay positive, be yourself, and remember to smile.

Are there forbidden topics when it comes to small talk? Probably. As a general guide, avoid talking about religion, politics, marriage, divorce, or sex when you're just getting to know someone, whether on a personal or professional basis. But there are always exceptions. To judge each situation, pay attention to whether the other person seems comfortable with your discussion; you never want anyone to be embarrassed about what they've shared with you. And if you find the conversation becoming emotionally charged during a strictly social interaction, change the subject.

Is that it?

Even if things are going well and you wish you could go on talking forever, let the other person decide how long the conversation lasts. Get signals from their body language, listen to their choice of words and, when it's time, make a graceful exit. Remember that by definition, small talk is just that: a short chat.

Why, then, put so much time and energy into mastering the fine art of small talk? Because "Why bother?" chatter often marks the beginning of a significant relationship. You never know who might become an important part of your life, or what conversations will later seem pivotal. Becoming adept at that bothersome little thing called small talk can be an investment that truly pays off.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). *Making the most of small talk*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

What is Cyberbullying?

Stand up to cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets, as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or e-mails, rumors sent by e-mail or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, Web sites, or fake profiles.

Why is cyberbullying different?

Kids who are being cyberbullied are often bullied in person as well. Additionally, kids who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior.

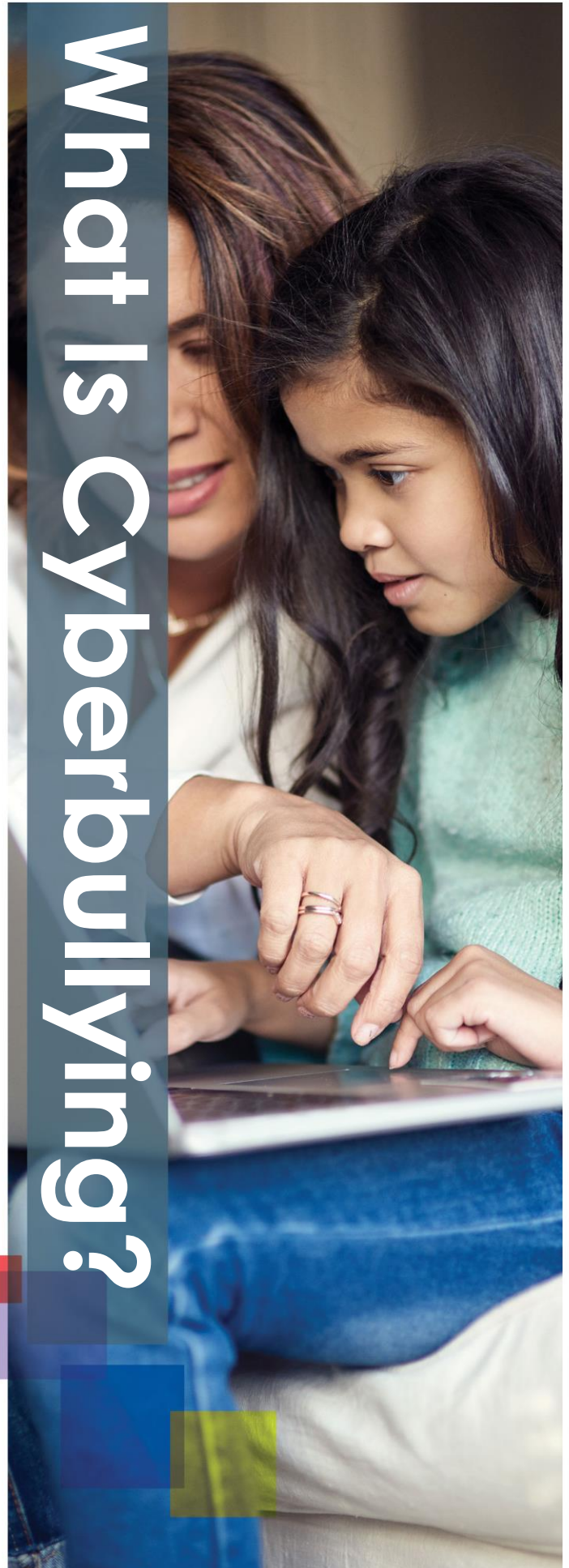
- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a kid even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

Effects of Cyberbullying

Cell phones and computers themselves are not to blame for cyberbullying. Social media sites can be used for positive activities, like connecting kids with friends and family, helping students with school, and for entertainment, but these tools can also be used to hurt other people. Whether done in person or through technology, the effects of bullying are similar. Kids who are cyberbullied are more likely to

- Use alcohol and drugs
- Skip school
- Experience in-person bullying
- Be unwilling to attend school
- Receive poor grades
- Have lower self-esteem
- Have more health problems

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Stopbullying.gov. (n.d.). In *What is cyberbullying*. Retrieved October 25, 2016, from <http://www.stopbullying.gov>



Adjusting to Having Your Kids at Home During COVID-19



Schools and many child care providers are currently closed for an extended period of time. Those who can are staying home to help slow the spread of COVID-19. This has created a challenge for parents who are now at home with their kids. So, what should you do while you and your kids are stuck at home? How do you deal with cabin fever and the loss of learning while kids are out of school? Below are tips that may help you through this adjustment.

Keep your routine going.

- Maintain your child's routine as closely as possible. Continue to get up at the same time as always and get ready for the day.
- Structure can help overcome the stress from so much change and uncertainty.
- Set aside time for learning and play.
- Try to maintain a sense of normalcy.

It's all about the plan.

- Planning activities in advance can save you a headache later. You could let your kids help choose some of the activities as well. This can give your children a sense of control during a potentially stressful and scary time.

- Pick a theme to structure the week's plans around. Let the kids get creative! Have your children help choose a theme for the week ahead.
- If you have a partner at home as well, split your time with the kids so that each of you can have time to get any work you need to complete done.
- Make sure to include some sort of physical activity to burn off some of that excess energy.
- Include cleaning activities, like wiping down commonly touched surfaces in the home, to help children understand how they are fighting the spread of COVID-19 too!

Reading is an excellent way to spend your time.

- Read stories with your children and discuss them. Ask questions about the story, and try to guess what will happen next. For older kids, have them write a book report.
- Even though libraries are closed, they still offer e-books for checkout. The Kindle app can be downloaded on your computer if you do not have an e-reader. This is a great, free resource for older kids who can read on their own.
- Libraries also offer audio books.

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Adjusting to Having Your Kids at Home During COVID-19 (Contd.,)



Everything can be a lesson.

- Cooking can be math, reading, and science all rolled into one fun lesson! Great kid-friendly recipes can be found online. Measurements can be turned into math problems and mixing can be a science lesson.
- Make spelling or math fun by letting kids work out problems, or copy spelling lists on windows with easy-to-clean, dry-erase markers or use sidewalk chalk outside. Make sure they have the supplies to clean their work when they're done.
- Have children practice handwashing techniques. They can choose different songs to sing while they wash their hands. Have a science lesson about the spread of germs.
- There are great resources for online learning that can be found on the internet by searching for age group and subject. You can locate anything from lesson plans and science experiments to virtual tours of museums online.

Don't let social distancing cause you to lose contact. Everyone is in this together!

- Let kids keep in contact with their friends via phone or video chat. Social time is still important for kids. A chance to talk to their friends or family members that they cannot visit right now could make your children feel better about the situation.
- Talk to other parents about what they are doing to keep kids entertained and learning. You are not

alone. Other parents are facing the same struggles. Sharing ideas can help overcome these obstacles.

- There are lots of blogs written by stay-at-home moms available online, and these can be great resources for new ideas.

Get outside when you can.

- If the weather is nice, give the kids a chance to play outside in the yard for a while.
- The backyard is a great place to complete messy science experiments. These activities save time and make clean-up easy.
- Take a walk as a family through the neighborhood.
- If your local parks are open, consider going for a walk on a trail that isn't busy. This can be a great chance to talk and learn about nature.

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