



Wellness Wednesday

Stress



Stressful experiences are a normal part of life, and the stress response is a survival mechanism that primes us to respond to threats. Some stress is positive: *Imagine standing in front of a crowd to give a speech and hitting it out of the park.* Stressful? Certainly. But also challenging and satisfying.

But when a stressor is negative and can't be fought off or avoided—such as layoffs at work or a loved one's medical crisis—or when the experience of stress becomes chronic, our biological responses to stress can impair our physical and mental health.

Stress is a natural part of every human's life. But if we don't have good coping skills, stress can become chronic. Be sure to take good care of yourself when you're feeling stressed: Take a walk in nature, call a friend, or create a list to keep you on track.

If your stress has become chronic or is causing health problems, consider reaching out to a mental health professional to get started on your healing journey.

Signs and symptoms: Stress can affect us emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Emotional and psychological symptoms of stress may include the following:

- anxiety or nervousness
- irritability
- racing thoughts
- inability to relax or enjoy yourself
- loss of your sense of humor
- feeling overwhelmed
- depression
- loss of interest in life or activities
- existing mental health conditions get worse

Physical symptoms of stress may include the following:

- tension
- insomnia
- dizziness or fainting
- sudden weight changes
- fatigue
- headache
- muscle aches
- heartburn
- nausea, diarrhea, stomach ache
- rashes or itchy skin
- sweating
- fast breathing or feeling like it's hard to breathe
- existing physical disorders get worse



What causes stress?

Stress can be caused by external factors, such as financial or relationship problems. Or internal factors, such as feelings of failure or uncertainty about the future. According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) 2021 Stress in America Survey, 74% of Americans reported various stress-related conditions within the last month. About 34% reported headaches, 34% were overwhelmed, 32% were fatigued, and 32% experienced changes in sleeping habits.

Common causes of stress:



Family: In the same 2021 Stress in America survey, 75% of Americans said that family responsibilities are a significant source of stress. Family stress can stem from aging parents, an overbooked schedule, health problems, or children having trouble in school—to name a few. A 2020 study found that children's stress, in particular, affects parents more than vice versa. It's like the old saying, "A parent is only as happy as their unhappiest child." In the same 2021 Stress in America survey, 75% of Americans said that family responsibilities are a significant source of stress.



Relationships: While healthy relationships can significantly enhance your life, they can also cause high levels of stress when things go wrong. About 68% of Americans say that relationships are a significant source of stress. Relationship stress can arise from numerous things: poor communication, mistrust, lack of effort, or the poor health of a partner. And when a relationship ends, it can lead to poor mental health. Recently divorced adults' physical and mental health have been found to be worse than those who were not recently divorced. Poor mental health was related to how much conflict occurred in the divorce.

Financial: Trying to make ends meet can be a big challenge for many people. Whether it's a low-paying job, debt, lack of savings, high bills, inflation, or an unexpected major expense, financial struggles are cited as a source of stress for about 64% of Americans.



Work: We spend a lot of time at work and with coworkers. Most of us have had at least a few bad experiences in the workplace and these experiences can cause high levels of stress, especially if they're ongoing. Some of the most common sources of stress in the workplace include: poor working conditions, ineffective managers, job instability, low pay, slacking or mean coworkers, rude clients or customers, too many hours, unreasonable expectations.



Health: Health is at the baseline of all we do. It's difficult to go to work, be a parent or reach your goals when your mental or physical health is poor. Various health stressors include the following:

- **Acute or Chronic illness.** This may include conditions such as autoimmune disease, diabetes, heart disease, chronic fatigue syndrome or pneumonia, a broken bone.
- **Addiction.** These may include substance, alcohol, pornography, or food addictions.
- **Mental health disorders.** Conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), phobias, or bipolar disorder can cause extreme levels of stress.



Internal stressors: Internal stressors are those that come from within. They could include feelings of failure, feeling unworthy, feeling hopeless, uncertainty, feeling overwhelmed, feeling unlovable. Internal stressors can sometimes start when you respond poorly to an external event. For instance, you might get a bad grade in a class and take that to mean you're a total failure. Internal stress can also stem from not knowing what's going to happen next. In fact, more than 3 in 5 adults report that uncertainty about the near future causes them stress.