

Stress

getthehealthy.ca/stress-your-health

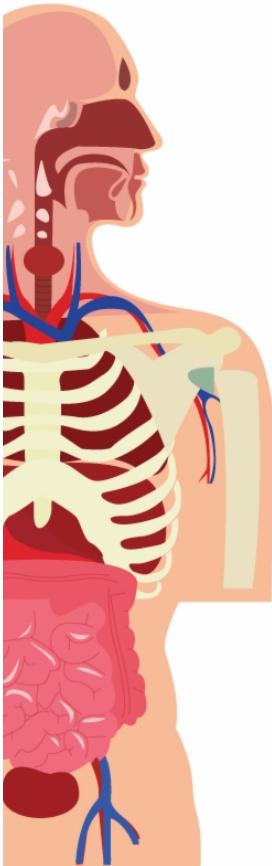
In this section you will learn:

- What stress is and how the body responds to it
- The impacts of long-term stress on your health
- Strategies to manage your stress

The Stress Response

- Stress is something that affects everyone in some form; it is how you respond to the stress that impacts your health.
- When you encounter a stressor, your body releases hormones, which trigger a “fight or flight” response. This response prepares your body to react to the perceived danger.
- Some of the physical effects of this response include increased heart rate, increased breathing rate, increased blood pressure, tunnel vision, nausea, reduced ability to concentrate, and muscle tension.

Health Impacts of Long-Term Stress



Brain

Difficulty concentrating, impaired memory, anxiety, depression, irritability, disordered sleep



Heart

Elevated heart rate and blood pressure, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, arrhythmias



Skin

Hair loss, brittle nails, dry skin, acne



Immune System

Decreased immune function, increased risk of becoming ill, prolonged recovery time



Digestion

Ulcers, irritable bowels, reflux, nausea, weight fluctuations, diarrhea



Reproductive System

Decreased hormone production, reduced sex drive, reduced fertility



Joints and Muscles

Inflammation, tension, reduced bone density

Stress hormones can impact your internal hunger cues, which may cause you to crave high calorie foods or to experience a loss of appetite. Long-term changes to exercise and eating habits can lead to unhealthy changes in body weight and waist circumference.

Stress Management Strategies

Regular physical activity and exercise: Each week, aim to complete 150 to 300 minutes of cardio-based exercise, and at least two days of resistance training. Exercise can help to release muscle tension and refocus your mind.

Deep breathing exercises: Movement of the diaphragm stimulates anti-stress hormone production in the brain, promoting relaxation.

Meditate: Help re-focus and re-train your mind on more positive thoughts and images.

Communicate: Talk to a friend, family member, or trained professional to help you find solutions to your stress.

Engage in social activities, hobbies or recreational activities: Setting aside time to participate in activities that you enjoy can help you cope more effectively with stress.

Prioritize sleep: Aim to get seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night. Improving your sleep hygiene can improve your immune system function, thinking patterns, and memory.

Try Belly Breathing!

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.
- Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, feeling your belly move outward.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, feeling your belly fall.

Ask Yourself

What causes you stress?
What stress management strategies work best for you?
Have you tried belly breathing?