



# Mental Health

## Stress showing up on your body?

Gaining weight and abdominal fat are linked to high levels of the hormone cortisol, which is released during emotional tension. Cortisol levels also may increase with caffeine use, sleep deprivation and viral infections. Also, stress can lead to overeating unhealthy foods. The right diet and physical activity can help control weight — but first try reducing chronic stress.

**Note:** Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

# Exercise and Feel Good

Some say regular exercise is the best medicine for emotional well-being. It releases chemicals that help reduce stress and improve sleep, mood and mental clarity — which all lead to a more positive outlook.

## How much exercise does it take? Not a lot:

**The standard exercise guidelines for health protection:** Get at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity weekly (e.g., brisk walking or fast dancing). Any amount is beneficial; focus on moving more and sitting less. Exercise at a pace that elevates your heart rate; this helps lower cortisol, a hormone linked to stress and anxiety.



Also, many studies have shown that yoga, tai chi and other mind-body exercises can significantly improve overall health. They provide a sense of focus and dedication that transfers into all aspects of your life.

If you're tempted to skip a workout, remind yourself that exercise is the key to your overall health and well-being. And it's never too late to start.

## Make the Mind-Body Connection

### Our emotional and physical health are deeply intertwined.

That's why if the body senses change in emotion or signs of danger from the brain (e.g., stress, anxiety), it may respond with a rush of hormones, increased blood pressure and other side effects that eventually could lead to chronic conditions.



Emotional changes often result from life events, even happy ones such as a new job. You may not even realize you're overwhelmed until the physical symptoms appear.

### Take steps to stay healthy, inside and out:

- 1 **Express** your emotions positively with a creative pursuit, physical activity or by talking to someone you trust, such as a counselor.
- 2 **Focus** on the positives in life. It helps you cope with stressful events and cherish what's important.
- 3 **Try** meditation or breathing exercises. These will help you identify your emotions and deal with them healthily to create resilience.
- 4 **Eat** nutritious foods, exercise, sleep seven to nine hours daily — and have fun.
- 5 **Talk** to your health care provider to rule out physical conditions or medications that could be affecting your emotional and mental health.

# Bounce Back from Setbacks

**Accept change.** It's a part of life.

**Look ahead.** Your current situation might be difficult, but it won't last. Meanwhile, try to adapt and see beyond the present to better times.

**Connect with others.** Forge strong relationships you can count on in tough times

**Recognize your self-worth.** You can bounce back. No matter how bad you feel today, always believe in yourself.

**Reduce stress.** Life is generally easier with regular exercise, rest, a healthy diet and daily relaxation.

**Set a goal and work to achieve it.** Moving in the right direction and seeing progress can help you see your way clear to better circumstances.

**We all experience setbacks.** Being resilient comes with practice: Try to develop a positive attitude that helps you accept circumstances and move beyond them.



## Clear Your Head

**Learn to dismiss the chatter in your head so you're free to think, solve problems and get more done in less time.** You might even feel less stressed at the end of the day.

### Try these techniques:

- ➡ **Move your body.** Take five minutes to walk (preferably outside), climb stairs or stretch out stiff muscles. Getting your blood pumping and your body moving can help settle your thoughts.
- ➡ **Visualize.** Stop what you're doing and see yourself completing what you must today successfully. Visualize the task by mentally reviewing the steps you need to get there.
- ➡ **Practice deep breathing.** As you breathe, put your hand on your stomach; your hand should move in and out. Make your exhale long and peaceful. A few slow breaths can clear the cobwebs and silence your inner chatter.
- ➡ **Change your location.** Another venue can give you respite from familiar distractions.
- ➡ **Book a conference room,** hide out in an empty workspace or even take your laptop outside (if possible).

## What's On Your Mind?

**Do you ever feel like your mind is going in a million directions at once?** Or maybe that it's about to burst from all of life's demands? Information overload can lead to stress, negativity and disorganization. What's the solution?



**It pays to pursue a balanced state of engagement or flow,** which is not only enjoyable but far more productive. Try these steps to declutter your mind:

**Challenge yourself, but not too much.** When a task is too easy, you are likely to get bored; when it's too hard, you may become frustrated and discouraged. Seek the Goldilocks zone of just-right difficulty.

**Tame your emotional tiger.** Recognize and label your feelings; then take steps to manage them. Try deep breathing, challenging your negative thoughts and problem solving (vs. just plain worrying).

**Stay focused.** You may not experience the zone (the ability to focus) until 20 minutes into a task, so set distractions aside and stick with the activity long enough to hit your stride.

**Break it up.** Every hour or so, take a few minutes to stretch, move or do something different. You'll be fresher and more alert when you return.

**Review these steps** as needed when you take on a new project.

## Benefits of meditation:

**Research has found that routine meditation and mindfulness therapies provide ongoing relief of stress and depression,** as well as improved immune function and biomarkers for healthy aging. The sustained positive effects were also seen in participants new to meditation. **Benefits of meditation:** An ongoing study has found that routine meditation and mindfulness therapies provide ongoing relief of stress and depression, as well as improved immune function and biomarkers for healthy aging. The sustained positive effects were also seen in participants new to meditation.

