

SUMMER

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Anthem 

Your EAP news

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Stress and your body

Stress isn't always a bad thing. For example, when you have an emergency, stress hormones can kick in to help your body take action. But if you have too much stress too often, it can harm you in ways you might not know.

Here's a look at what stress can do to your body:

- **Heart disease:** Added up, daily stress can lead to heart attacks. Type A people, who are known for being more tense and hurried, have a higher risk of heart problems.
- **Strokes:** If you're very stressed or get stressed on a regular basis, you can have a much higher risk of a stroke.
- **High blood pressure:** Stress hormones make your blood pressure go up right away.
- **Lowered immunity:** Stress can make it easier for you to get the flu, colds and other infectious diseases.
- **Digestive problems:** Stress is proven to lower the number of helpful bacteria in the digestive system, which can lead to indigestion, diarrhea, constipation and other problems.
- **Headaches and muscle aches:** Tension and stress are common causes of headaches and muscle aches.
- **Changes in sleep:** People who have a lot of stress often have trouble sleeping or feel the need to sleep too much, which can also be a sign of depression.

Stress can also be a reason why people do things like smoke, overeat, and abuse drugs and alcohol — and that can lead to a lot of other health issues.

Help your body beat stress with exercise

Exercise is often the best weapon against stress. Regular exercise can:

- **Release hormones that help you control stress** and fight depression.
- **Help your brain** feel emotions in a more typical way.
- **Get your mind in shape** by giving you a break from your worries and leaving you with more energy.
- **Help you feel better** about yourself because it changes the way you look and feel.
- **Help you sleep better**, which can help you deal with stress.



Lecturas recomendadas para esta temporada

Tu programa Employee Assistance Program (EAP) también ofrece información útil en español. Para leer los artículos que enviamos este trimestre, visita anthemEAP.com y selecciona español. Encontrarás la lista de temas tratados en esta edición en la sección "Noticias para Usted."

continued>>

Eat right to fight stress

Your body needs more vitamins and minerals when you're under stress. But too often, people who are stressed reach for foods rich in fat and calories.

In stressful situations:

- *Eat foods high in vitamins and fiber. These include:* poultry, fish, beans and legumes, low-fat dairy products, whole grains and cereals, and fruits and vegetables.
- *Try foods with complex carbohydrates like pasta and potatoes.* They can help reduce stress because the body absorbs them more slowly.
- *Don't skip meals.* Getting too hungry will only make you reach for the wrong foods when your blood sugar is low.
- *Avoid caffeine, alcohol and stimulants* in medicines and other drinks.

Try these stress busters

Feeling stressed? Take a walk around the building at work. Stand up from your office chair and stretch often to cut down tension in your body. And see the "Mindfulness exercises" article to learn how to have a less stressful state of mind.

Source: Workplace Options, "Stress and Your Body" (Revised 2018). Raleigh, NC.



Mindfulness exercises

Taking a mental break and practicing mindfulness can help you cut down on stress, anxiety and depression, and even lower your blood pressure. Try these three simple exercises from the Mayo Clinic:

The body scan meditation

Lie on your back with your arms at your sides, palms up. Focus your attention slowly and on each part of your body, in order, from your toe to your head or head to toe. Be aware of each part as you travel through it in your mind.

Sitting meditation

Sit in a chair comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. Don't focus on anything but your breath.

Walking meditation

Find a quiet place, 10 to 20 feet long, and begin to walk slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, noticing how it feels to move and keep your balance. When you reach the end of your path, turn and keep walking, focusing on your movement.

Source: Mayo Clinic website: "Mindfulness exercises" (August 17, 2018): [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org).

Talking with teenagers about violence

Today, too many teenagers experience violent situations firsthand. These teens need the support of people who love them, whether they've seen a violent act or have been a victim. Of course, you need to make sure they're okay physically – but as a parent or guardian, it's also important to listen, remain open and available, and let them know you're there for them.

Here are some ways you can help your teen express what they think and feel:

- Reach out by first finding private time to talk. Use conversation openers like, "You haven't seemed yourself lately," "You seem kind of down" or "Is something bothering you?"
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and tell what happened.
- Expect some difficult behavior, but don't let them break the rules out of sympathy.
- Respond calmly to what they say.
- Don't judge or rush to give advice.
- Don't downplay their feelings by saying things like, "Don't worry" or "Cheer up."
- Keep anniversaries in mind. For example, a teen may feel upset on the date the violence happened, even years later.
- Help them identify and label their feelings. For example, "I can understand why this made you angry."
- Praise their efforts to talk about their thoughts and feelings. For example, tell them, "I'm glad you're sharing this with me."

- Respond supportively when they tell you about the event. Don't disagree or try to lessen the intensity of their feelings.
- Encourage them to write about their thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Encourage them to talk to people they feel comfortable with. They might choose to talk to close friends or a trusted teacher, coach or counselor.

Make sure your teen feels safe and in control. Here are some ways you can help make that happen:

- Find out what's making them feel unsafe and help them make a safety plan. For example, you might suggest that they don't try to stop the violence, and that they leave the place where it's happening and go somewhere safe.
- Help them find things that bring them comfort, like listening to music, playing sports, keeping a journal or looking at photos.
- Join them in safe and fun physical activities to release tension. Encourage them to take a hike with you or to play basketball with friends.
- Enroll them in programs that teach conflict-resolution skills.
- Don't say things like, "You'll be safe from now on." Instead you might say, "Let's make a plan to keep you as safe as possible."
- Suggest real things they can do to overcome the event. You might start by saying, "I'm sorry that this is happening to you. You're not alone. Let's take a look at your options."

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention website: "Teenagers, Ages 12-18," *Healing the Invisible Wounds: Children's Exposure to Violence* (accessed July 2016): ojdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/programs/safestart/HealingTheInvisibleWounds.pdf.





Getting a good night's sleep

Do you have trouble sleeping? If so, you're not alone. Research says that between 50 and 70 million Americans have a chronic sleep disorder. Try these tips for getting a better night's sleep:

- *Create a relaxing place to sleep.* Keep the room dark, cool and quiet. And try to keep electronics like computers, TVs and phones out of your bedroom, since the light from their screens can affect sleep hormones.
- *Set a sleep schedule.* Go to bed and get up at the same times each day, even on the weekends.
- *Exercise regularly.* It can help improve the quality of your sleep. But don't exercise too close to bedtime, because that could make it harder to fall asleep.
- *Avoid late-night meals and alcohol.* It could affect your sleep later in the night.
- *Schedule downtime before bed.* Set aside some time to unwind and get into a sleepy state of mind.
- *Don't check the clock.* Watching how long it's taking you to fall asleep could stop you from doing it!

Source: American Psychological Association website: "Getting a Good Night's Sleep" (accessed March 2019): apa.org.



Important: This document is intended for general information only. It does not provide the reader with specific direction, advice, or recommendations. You may wish to contact an appropriate professional for questions concerning your particular situation. Schedule a checkup with your doctor to discuss any stress you may be experiencing. Always consult with your doctor before beginning any exercise program or meal plan.

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