



# Coping with Stress

*A Special Addition to **Staying Healthy: An English Learner's Guide to Health Care and Healthy Living***

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**A Special Addition to *Staying Healthy:*  
*An English Learner's Guide to*  
*Health Care and Healthy Living***

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Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center**

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## Everyday Stresses



**Dangerous Situations**



**Big Changes**



**Financial Worries**

## What is Stress?

Everyone has stress. **Stress** is your body's response to a change or difficult situation. It is a natural response.

There are events everyday that require your attention. Some are dangerous and need immediate attention, like when you are almost hit by a car. Big changes like getting married or moving can be stressful, too.

**Hassles** are the little things that can bother us, like catching many red lights when you are driving or forgetting to take out the garbage. When we have a lot of stress in our life, hassles may bother us more than usual. If you find yourself getting very upset over little things, you might have too much stress in your life.

We can't avoid stress. It is part of life. You need to know how to cope with stress. Knowing how to cope with stress helps you prepare for anything that comes your way.



**This chapter will answer these questions:**



- What is stress?
- Where does stress come from?
- How does stress affect my health?
- How can I cope with stress?



## What Happens When I'm Stressed?

When a stack of books looks like it might fall on you, you jump out of the way. Suddenly, your heart beats fast. Your breathing is faster, too.

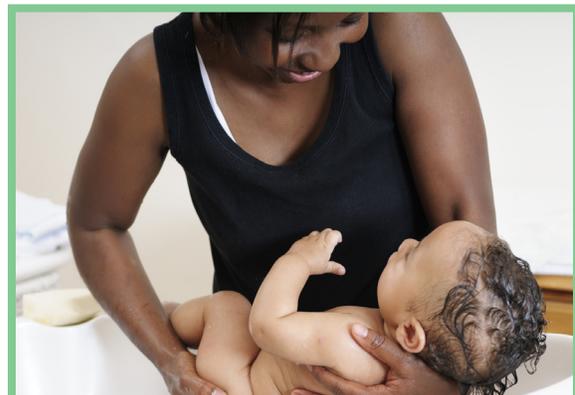
If this happens, it means your body reacted. This is called the **stress response**. This reaction kept you from getting hurt. You may feel your blood pressure go up and your muscles get tense. You may also begin to sweat too.

The stress response is also called the **fight-or-flight response**. Your body prepares to defend you or run away from any given situation.

## Where Does Stress Come From?

Any change or demand can be a **stressor**. Some changes or needs in life are bad. If you lose a job, you may need to find a new one. A death in the family may change your life. A car wreck may cause injuries. These are bad stressors.

Some changes or challenges in life are good. Getting married is a good thing. Getting married may also change your life. A new baby is good. But new babies are demanding. These things can change your life in a good way. They are also stressors.



Your body may not tell the difference between good and bad stressors.

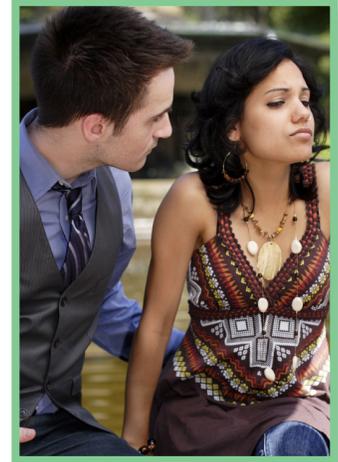
**It may react the same way!**

## How Long Does Stress Last?

There are many common stressors. Some last only a short time. This is called **acute stress**. Examples of acute stressors include arguing with a friend, celebrating a holiday, or getting a flat tire.

Acute stress can end when a problem ends.

Some stressors continue for a long time. This is called **chronic stress**. Examples of chronic stressors include raising children, lack of job benefits, and money worries.



You don't have just one kind of stressor or the other. Acute and chronic stressors can occur at the same time. It is not always easy to cope with both stresses at the same time.

Sometimes we can predict stressors. If work gets very busy or the holidays are stressful, you can prepare yourself so that the stress is not so big. Other times we do not know when a stressor will affect us. If your child suddenly gets very sick, you were probably not expecting that. It can be helpful, though, if you already have regular ways to cope with stress.

## Stress Can Be Anywhere

Stress can occur in many different places in your life. Often times something that is stressful in one part of your life can cause stress in other parts, too. For instance, if you are stressed out at work because of your co-workers or boss, you may still feel angry and upset when you get home. The work stress can then affect your family life.

Knowing what stresses you allows you to make positive changes to cope with the stress.

### Different Events That May Be Stressful

|                                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| death of a family member          | being overweight    |
| divorce or separation             | new job             |
| the holidays                      | aging               |
| pregnancy                         | chronic illness     |
| dangerous weather like hurricanes | sleeping too little |

## How Can Stress Affect My Health?

Stress can wear your body out. It can hurt your health. The first symptoms are often small. You might have more headaches. You might have stomach aches. You might have problems sleeping.

Over time symptoms can get worse. You can get a lot of colds. Sores may not heal quickly. You can get very sad, sick, or **depressed**. You can have difficulty getting pregnant.

The effects of stress can be dangerous. Chronic stress can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, and diabetes. If you are pregnant, it can even affect your baby. The baby may come early. The baby may be very weak if it is born too early.

Stress can also affect your thinking. It may affect what you do, too. These symptoms interact and affect each other. Here are ways that stress can affect you:



### HOW YOUR BODY FEELS

- Aches and pains
- Upset stomach
- Feeling dizzy
- Chest pain
- High blood pressure
- Loss of sex drive
- Getting colds often
- Breathing problems
- Trouble sleeping
- Skin problems
- Shaky muscles
- Sweating
- Turning red
- Heartburn
- Diarrhea

### WHAT YOU THINK

- Sadness
- Doubts
- Constant worrying
- Anger
- Fear
- Negative thoughts
- Worry about health
- Guilt
- Confusion
- No confidence

### WHAT YOU DO

- Eating more or less
- Nervous habits (nail biting, pacing)
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Cannot relax
- Cannot concentrate
- Avoiding people or projects
- Cannot make choices
- Sloppy work
- Fighting
- Arguing
- Missing work
- Buying things you don't need
- Crying



## How Can I Cope with Stress?

You will always have stress. The key is how you cope with it. Coping helps take away the bad effects of stress. There are four basic ways to cope. The one(s) you use depends on the stressor. It depends on you, too. You can figure out what works for you. If you have trouble knowing what works for you, a mental health counselor may be able to help you.

- **Accept** the stressor
- **Avoid** the stressor
- **Change** the stressor
- **Change** yourself or the way you think about the stressor

## Stressors You May Need to Accept

You cannot avoid all stressors. Sometimes the best thing to do is to accept them. But you can learn to cope with that stress. Death, for instance, is unavoidable. It is up to the living to learn how to cope with the feelings that they have when someone dies.

Having a **support system** may help. Family and friends who understand your grief can help you accept the death of someone close to you. Some people go to church or turn to their faith to help them.

## Stressors You May Need to Avoid

You can cope with some stressors by avoiding certain places or people. You might not have enough money for bills because you shop too much. You can change your behavior. You can take just enough cash to pay for what you need. You can also use coupons.

Sometimes you are so busy you feel stressed. Learning to say no to people is not always easy, but saying no can reduce your stress. This helps you take care of your health.





## Stressors You May Need to Change

You may need to make changes in your life to cope with some stressors. Change is not always easy. But change may be the best way to cope with stressors. If you weigh too much, eating better and getting exercise is probably the change you need. You can be healthier and remove your stressor!

If work stresses you too much, you may want to try changing jobs. You might find a job you like more. Changing your stressor by changing what you do in good ways is better for you.



## Change How You Think about a Stressor

Changing how you think about a person or situation may take more work. But, changing your view can change or remove a stressor. There are many ways you can look at a problem or person. Try to keep a positive outlook. For instance, if you get laid off, don't think you will never get another job. Focus on the future. Your next job can be better for you.

When stressors are big, it may be helpful to take a big problem and break it down into smaller problems. For example, someone might think, "I cannot learn English. It is too hard. There are so many words to know." Take this problem and change the way you think about it by saying, "I do not have to learn English in one day. Today I will learn five words of English. Tomorrow I will learn five more words."

**You will always have stress.  
The key is how you cope with it.**

## Good Ways to Cope With Stress

There are good ways to cope with stress. Some can be done right away and others take more time. Here are some things you can do to cope with stress in a healthy way:

- Exercise releases tension from the body.
- Having a **support system** of family and friends helps you feel better.
- Let go of negative thoughts with **positive self-talk**.
- Do something **relaxing**, like deep breathing, stretching, listening to music, reading, or a hot bath.
- Learning more about stress helps you cope better.
- Being **flexible** lets you try and learn new things.
- Writing in a journal helps you think about your feelings.
- A **hobby** you enjoy may make you feel better.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Prioritize your time and know your limitations.
- Simplify your life.
- Focus on one task at a time.
- Do not compare your life to others.



## Bad Ways to Cope With Stress

There are also bad ways to cope with stress. These may make you feel better for a little while. Over time, they make things worse. These include:

- Eating too much or too little
- Smoking or chewing tobacco
- Gambling
- Spending too much money
- Drinking alcohol
- Using drugs
- Watching too much TV
- Putting off things you must do
- Staying away from others
- Sleeping too much
- Taking out stress on others (blaming, arguing, fighting)



## What Else Can I Do to Cope With Stress?

A lot of stress comes from what we tell ourselves. What we say can make stress worse. What we say can reduce stress.

| Replacing Negative Self Talk with Positive Self Talk                        |   |
|---|---|
| REPLACE THIS THOUGHT...   | WITH THIS THOUGHT   |
| I'm never going to finish this.   | Step by step, I will finish what I need to do.  |
| I hate my job.  | There are things I like about my job.   |
| I have so many bills to pay. I'll buy something to make myself feel better. | I have a lot of bills to pay. How can I reduce my expenses or make more money to pay for the things I need?                                       |
| My boss is so unfair. I have more responsibilities than anyone else.        | My boss must think I am really good at what I do. I have more responsibilities than anyone else. I can really show that I am a valuable employee. |
| I'm so lonely. No one ever calls me.  | I bet there are lots of people that need help. Where could I volunteer my time?   |

## When to Get Counseling

If your stress is too high, you may need professional help. There are people called **therapists** and **mental health counselors** who can help you cope with your problems. Often times talking to an objective person can shine a new light on a problem or stressful situation. A therapist or mental health counselor may help even if a situation is not a problem, but you just want someone to talk to.

If the stress gets to be too much, or you are thinking of ending your life, please seek help right away!



**SUICIDE HOTLINE NUMBER**  
1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK

**TO FIND SERVICES IN YOUR AREA,**  
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/samh/index.shtml>

## How Can I Learn More?

### Information

#### **Preventing Burnout**

[http://helpguide.org/mental/burnout\\_signs\\_symptoms.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/burnout_signs_symptoms.htm)

#### **Coping with Stress**

[http://www.holisticonline.com/stress/stress\\_home.htm](http://www.holisticonline.com/stress/stress_home.htm)

#### **Manage Health**

<http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicID=45&areaID=0>

#### **Help for Couples**

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/2006/the-10-secrets-of-happy-couples>

### Activities

#### **Healthy Lifestyle**

<http://healthylifestyle.upmc.com/StressRelaxation.htm>

#### **Online Relaxation Activities**

<http://www.allaboutdepression.com/relax/>

#### **Stress Relievers: Fun and Games for Managing Stress**

[http://stress.about.com/od/funandgames/Fun\\_and\\_Games\\_for\\_Managing\\_Stress.htm](http://stress.about.com/od/funandgames/Fun_and_Games_for_Managing_Stress.htm)

#### **Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief**

[http://helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_relief\\_meditation\\_yoga\\_relaxation.htm#response](http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm#response)

#### **Guided Imagery**

[http://www.holisticonline.com/stress/stress\\_visualization.htm](http://www.holisticonline.com/stress/stress_visualization.htm)

#### **Stress Management**

<http://www.mindtools.com/smpage.html>

[http://helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_management\\_relief\\_coping.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm)

#### **Top 10 Tension Reducing Activities**

<http://stress.about.com/od/generaltechniques/tp/toptensionacts.htm>

#### **Family Activities**

<http://family.go.com>

### Free or Low Cost Services

#### **211 Information and Referral Search**

<http://211.org/>

#### **Free Suicide and Crisis Hotline**

<http://suicidehotlines.com/florida.html>

## COPING WITH STRESS STUDENT EDITION - GLOSSARY

| Word & Pronunciation  | Definition   | You Can Find It Here |
|---|--|----------------------|
| <b>acute stress</b><br>ah KEWT STRA ess                       | stressors that only last for a short time, like getting a flat tire                                  | 3                    |
| <b>chronic stress</b><br>CRON ick STRA ess                    | stressors that continue for a long time, like money worries  | 3                    |
| <b>depression</b><br>DEE pres SHUN                            | feeling very sad or bad  | 4                    |
| <b>fight or flight response</b><br>FAHyt or FLYyt REE spons   | body prepares to defend or run away from a stressful situation                                       | 2                    |
| <b>flexibility</b><br>FLEX eh bill eh TEE                     | being willing to change and adapt to situations  | 7                    |
| <b>hassles</b><br>HASS uls                                    | little things that can bother us and become bigger issues when stress is high                        | 1                    |
| <b>hobbies</b><br>HOB bees                                    | activities that are enjoyable like running or painting   | 7                    |
| <b>mental health counselor</b><br>MEN tal HELLth COUNS sa lir | a professional who helps people cope with emotional and personal matters                             | 8                    |
| <b>positive self-talk</b><br>POS sa TIV self - TA LLk         | changing the way you think to let go of negative energy  | 7, 8                 |
| <b>relax</b><br>REE lax                                       | finding something that can calm your nerves like listening to music, a hot bath, or deep breathing   | 7                    |
| <b>stress</b><br>STRA ess                                     | body's reaction to a change or difficult situation   | 1-11                 |
| <b>stressor</b><br>STRA ess ERR                               | any change or demand, good or bad  | 2-11                 |
| <b>stress response</b><br>STRA ess REE spons                  | body's reaction to change or a difficult situation   | 2                    |
| <b>support system</b><br>SUP ort SIS tem                      | family or friends that help you in stressful situations by listening and understanding your feelings | 5, 7                 |
| <b>therapist</b><br>THARE ah pIST                             | a professional who helps people cope with emotional and personal matters                             | 8                    |



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