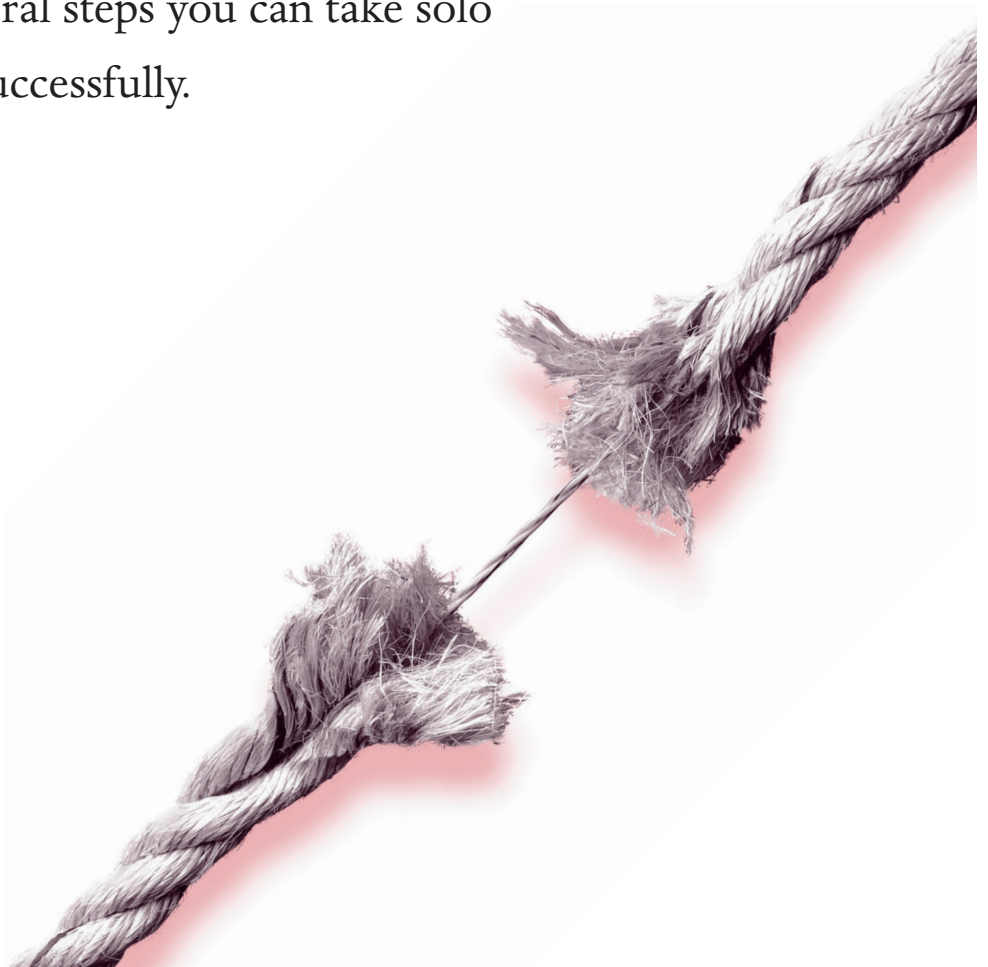


Coping With Stress

Techniques and Tips to Help

If you're making changes in your life to manage your cholesterol levels and to enjoy better health, you probably need help—many people do.

When handling the stress of daily life is also on your “help” list, there are several steps you can take solo or with others to cope successfully.



What Is Stress?

Stress has many faces and is different for different people. But simply put, medical science defines stress as our bodies' response to change. Whether we're feeling physical stress (from not enough sleep, for example) or mental stress (worrying about money or a loved one's health), our bodies automatically respond. Our blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing rate go up.

The Health/Stress Connection

The problem with stress isn't stress itself; a certain amount is part of life. However, the way that we view and handle stress may have a strong impact on our health. Scientists don't know whether stress actually increases the risk of heart disease.

What is known, though, is that high levels of stress and chronic stress may affect other risk factors for heart problems.



These risk factors include high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, smoking, not getting enough exercise, and overeating. So handling stress in positive ways can have a positive effect on our health.

How Can I Tell if I Have Too Much Stress?

Since stress is different for different people, there is no one set of signs or symptoms that tell you if you have too much stress in your life. A situation that might be stressful to someone else—sitting in traffic, for example—might be an ordinary experience for you. The key is knowing your tolerance levels for stress.

Stress can produce physical, emotional, and other problems that can affect your health, energy, and peace of mind. When there's too much stress, people may have insomnia, backaches, or headaches. This stress overload can be a factor in more serious conditions, such as heart disease.

10 Tips for Managing Stress

If you need help coping with everyday demands and tensions, try the following tips. Remember: while stress is a natural part of life, how you respond to it can either help or harm you.

- 1. Just say “no.”** If you feel overwhelmed by an activity of yours or your family’s, bow out. If pressed for your reasons, give them.
- 2. Take time for your mind.** Meditate for 10 to 20 minutes, listen to music, or try to think of pleasant things or nothing at all.
- 3. Move.** Exercise is a great way to relieve stress. Regular physical activity benefits both mind and body.
- 4. Break down big tasks.** When a workload or project seems overwhelming, pick one priority task and do it, then move on to the next.
- 5. Get the health habit.** Eat right, get enough sleep, limit your caffeine and alcohol intake, and exercise.
- 6. Speak up.** Talking about your problems with someone who cares lets them help and keeps you from feeling alone.
- 7. See your success.** Create a mental picture of yourself handling a stressful situation well. This visualization technique helps many people put a tough situation in a positive light.
- 8. Let hobbies help.** Take a stress break by taking part in something you enjoy.
- 9. Be (im)perfectly yourself.** Don’t expect perfection from yourself or from others. Be realistic about what you can do, what you can’t, and when you need help.
- 10. Lighten up.** If you often find yourself at odds with people, try to be more flexible—maybe even give in sometimes. Others may meet you halfway and help you see better solutions to problems.

Is your stress more than a temporary situation, maybe more than you can handle? If you think that’s the case, ask your doctor for a referral to a counseling professional.

Remember

You don't have to "just put up" with stress. And for your health's sake, you shouldn't. Recognizing high levels of stress or chronic stress is the first step toward taking positive action. Ask your doctor for additional information or resources on coping with stress.