

Get Healthy with Your Benefits: Stress Management

VEBA Online



Stressed out?

Stress can put you at risk for high blood pressure and heart disease, trigger headaches and asthma attacks, and worsen other conditions.

According to the online help center of the American Psychological Association (APA):

- 43% of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress
- 75% to 90% of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints
- Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death — heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.

Are you too stressed?

You are too stressed if:

- You often feel irritable
- You can't sleep or you're always sleepy
- You don't get any joy out of life
- You lose your appetite or you overeat
- You have trouble getting along with your family and friends.

Tips to relieve stress

If you're feeling stressed, try some of these tips:

- Focus on one thing at a time
- Look for the positive in the situation
- Exercise
- Go to bed earlier
- Eat healthful meals, especially breakfast and lunch
- Reduce or eliminate caffeine
- Take breaks
- Take time off work, even if it's just a few days
- Start a hobby.

online resources

Here are some places you can go to for help or for more information on stress management:

- HealthMedia Relax® (for Kaiser Permanente members) — personalized strategies for relieving and preventing stress
- Your primary care physician
- Mayo Clinic Web site at www.mayoclinic.com. Find tips for reducing the effects of stress. Click on “stress” under “Healthy Living Centers”
- The employee assistance program (EAP), which is administered by PacificCare Behavioral Health (PBH) and available to all VEBA members. Call 1-800-999-9585 or go to www.pbhi.com for help. Assistance is available 24 hours per day, everyday.
- Your medical plan's mental health providers. Check with your medical plan at www.kaiserpermanente.org or www.pacificare.com for information on your mental health benefits and to locate a provider in your area.
- Support groups. Go to www.mayoclinic.com to help you find a group that's right for you.

Different types of stress

Stress management can be complicated because there are different types of stress, each with its own characteristics, symptoms, duration, and treatment approaches:

- Acute stress
- Episodic acute stress
- Chronic stress.

Acute stress

Acute stress is the most common form of stress, and affects each of us on a regular basis. This type of short-term stress is caused by such things as traffic jams, long lines at the store, and missed flights. Too much short-term stress can lead to psychological distress, tension headaches, upset stomach, and other symptoms. Fortunately, symptoms are recognized by most people, and, because acute stress is short term, it doesn't have enough time to do the extensive damage associated with long-term stress.

The most common symptoms of acute stress are:

- Emotional distress (i.e., anger or irritability, anxiety, and depression)
- Muscular problems, including tension headache and back pain
- Stomach problems.

Episodic acute stress

People whose lives are chaotic and always feel like they're in a crisis suffer from episodic acute stress.

Common symptoms are:

- Persistent tension headaches
- Migraines
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Chest pain.

Treating this type of stress generally requires professional help, and may take many months to treat.

Chronic stress

Chronic stress is the kind of stress that, over the long term, destroys bodies, minds and lives. Chronic stress comes when a person cannot see a way out of a horrible situation (e.g., poverty).

The symptoms of chronic stress are difficult to treat and may require extended medical and behavioral treatment, as well as stress management.