Stress Management

What is stress?
Stress is a physical and emotional reaction that everyone experiences as we encounter changes in our lives. These reactions increase our concentration and are necessary in order to prepare us for a challenge. Having met the challenge, the body relaxes. When situations cause, or perceive to cause, non-stop stress, the body doesn’t get a chance to relax. This causes chronic stress.

What causes stress?
Any situation you perceive as a problem can cause you stress. These are called stressors and it’s important to identify what causes the stress in order to try to control it. The list of possible stressors is endless. Most stressors fall into one of the following categories:

- **Social or Family:** Major life events such as divorce or retirement
- **Occupational:** Job-related problems like fear of losing a job or deadlines
- **Educational:** Pressures from attending school including homework and exams
- **Health:** Illness, chronic health problems or pain
- **Financial:** Money problems like debt or inability to meet expenses
- **Environmental:** External conditions such as hurricanes

What does Stress do to the body?
Stress causes your body to make physical and chemical changes. When you are under stress, your body’s first reactions are a rise in blood pressure, quicker breathing, increased perspiration, quicker heartbeat and dilated pupils. All your senses go on high alert. The body stays keyed up until the danger passes and then returns to a state of calmness. However, if the high levels of stress continue, the senses stay on high alert. When the body no longer has the energy to adapt, it becomes exhausted. This damages the body’s organs and can even cause death.

Stress has been associated with many health problems. Some of these are high blood pressure, heart trouble, asthma, fatigue and muscle pain. If stress is not relieved, it can cause emotional problems such as anxiety or depression. Stress can also hurt your relationships with friends, family and coworkers.

What are the signs of stress?
Major problems can be avoided if symptoms are identified early. You probably already know some of them—headaches, tense muscles, knotted stomach and sweaty palms. Some of the signs of serious problems are:

- Persistent depression
- Chronic sleeping problems (too much or too little)
- Over-eating or persistent weight problems
- Sexual problems
- Frequent illness
- Mental confusion
- Outbursts of violence
- Persistent family conflict
- Excessive drinking or drug use
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What you can do to manage stress?

- **Stay strong and healthy.** A healthy lifestyle helps you prevent stress. Physical activity, healthy food choices, and a regular sleep schedule help you stay well.
- **Self-confidence.** Believe that you can do things well even when you have doubts.
- **Develop a positive attitude.** Although you can’t always control what happens to you, you can control your attitude toward life events. The only person who can give you a good attitude is you!
- **Laugh.** Humor helps us cope and relieves tension.
- **Learn to relax.** Deep breathing—slow deep breaths—it’s portable and simple.
- **The power of hope.** You are not alone and you do have the power to overcome your obstacles—physical and mental.
- **Remain resilient.** You can move forward—no matter what curveball is thrown your way.
- **Build healthy relationships.** Healthy relationships allow for individuality, bring out the best in both people and invite personal growth.

**Health First offers services customized to meet your needs:**

- Create a personal Stress Management Plan online at [www.myHFHP.org](http://www.myHFHP.org).
- Work with a Professional Health Coach. To enroll today log on to [www.myHFHP.org](http://www.myHFHP.org), choose Health Living and then select health coaching. Or call: **1-800-308-5848**.
- Log on to Magellan at [www.MagellanHealth.com/Members](http://www.MagellanHealth.com/Members) to access tools and information regarding mental health resources available.