



Managing Stress

Enhance your overall health

This handout gives information about stress, and why managing stress is important for people who have diabetes.

Why is managing stress important?

- Managing stress well can help you manage your diabetes well.
- Knowing your symptoms of stress will help you choose stress-control methods that work for you.
- Practicing stress-control methods can lead to feelings of greater well-being.

Overview

▶ *When is stress good?* _____

▶ *When is stress bad?* _____

Stress is the effect any situation has on our bodies and minds. Some people call this *pressure*.

Life is filled with stress and pressure. The issues that come up in our lives have an effect on the way our bodies react and on how we think and feel. We tend to think about stress as bad, but when the pressure is on, in certain situations you can make stress work for you.

Stress can affect our bodies in different ways. It can cause headaches, upset stomach, and sleeplessness. It can



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make some minor illnesses, such as colds, occur more often and last longer. It can add to the development of some serious chronic diseases, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and stomach ulcers. It can also cause flare-ups in these chronic diseases and in others that have been under control, such as asthma and diabetes.

Stress can make symptoms worse in just about any illness, from flu to cancer. And, stress that is not managed or controlled can lead us to take on habits that are very dangerous to health, such as smoking, excessive drinking, and poor eating.

Stress and Diabetes

It is perfectly normal to think of diabetes as adding more stress to your life. And, stress can and will affect your diabetes control. But, stress can also motivate us to do new things, to grow, to learn, and to make changes for the better.

Stress becomes harmful when there is no way to manage it or to make it work for you. Sometimes your own personality makes it harder to manage stress. At other times, the situation creating the stress cannot be managed – or at least not right away or without help from others. Stress is part of our lives. It is not realistic to expect that we can do away with it totally.

Accepting that harmful stress is part of all our worlds does not mean you should live in fear about how it affects your diabetes. Worrying about being out of control every time you don't manage stress perfectly will only create more stress.

Setting goals you can reach, building regular exercise into your life, eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, and getting support from family and friends are all important to good diabetes control. And, all of this will help you manage your stress level.

Symptoms of Stress

Each person responds differently to stress. Some common ways our bodies show stress are dry mouth, faster heartbeat, sweating, and heavier breathing. Some harmful responses to stress are:

- Hoping stress will go away
- Ignoring your feelings
- Trying to do it all yourself
- Thinking only about bad things
- Blaming yourself
- Expecting yourself to be perfect

- Expecting to be able to change everything
- Treating your body badly by smoking, drinking too much alcohol, not eating enough, or eating too much

Stress that isn't controlled or managed can cause very uncomfortable feelings. Some of these may be anger, frustration, depression, helplessness, fear, and guilt.

▶ *Do you have symptoms of stress? What are they?*

▶ *Take the **Stress Inventory** to find out more about your symptoms of stress. What did you learn about your stress symptoms?*

Causes of Stress

Some things that cause stress, such as everyday pressures and personality traits, have already been discussed. Other causes include relationship problems, unexpected events, traffic, work, school, loss, and death of loved ones.

▶ *Do the **Worry Box** exercise on the worksheet.*

Ways to Manage Stress

There are many ways to manage stress. The ways that work for you may not work as well for someone else, and vice versa. To get started on managing stress in your life, it will help to:

- Know how you react to stress. These are called your “stress reactions.”
- Cope with the causes of stress inside yourself.
- Manage your time well.
- Work together with others for change.
- Learn ways to relax your mind and body when you feel stressed.

▶ *List some ways you manage stress:*

Techniques for Managing Stress

- Deep breathing
- Positive statements
- Visualization
- Meditation
- Time management
- Quick “stress busters”

Goals

▶ *What are your goals for stress control?*

▶ *What new stress control methods did you learn about that you would like to try?*

What Else

- Learning to control stress takes time and practice.
- Skipping steps in the process to manage stress makes it hard to succeed. You may do a great job of relaxing your mind and body for a short time. But for long-term stress management, you must get in touch with your stress reactions, realize the causes of stress inside yourself, manage your time well, and do other things that will help you lower your stress level.
- Ask someone on your care team for help or a referral if stress is getting in the way of good diabetes control or if it is keeping you from working on some of the other goals you have set.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Diabetes Care Center:
206-598-4882