

# Let's Talk About Stress

Getting a grip on stress before it gets the better of you is a good preventive strategy for maintaining positive mental health.

Stress is the negative mental or emotional strain that your body exhibits in response to various physical, environmental, emotional, or chemical factors. Stress is unavoidable, and it results not only from major life events, but also from the basic challenges of everyday life; the pressure to perform well at work or school, to manage time and finances, and to make time for family and friends.

While stress can sometimes be a good motivator for getting things done, too much stress can be detrimental to your well-being. Ongoing stress results in high levels of stress hormones that can disrupt your body's processes, weaken your immune system, and make you more susceptible to mental and physical illness.

## What can you do about stress?

### Be proactive

When you start feeling stressed or anxious, acknowledge and accept it. Take a break and engage in activities that help your natural relaxation response kick-in, like going for a walk or taking a few deep breaths.

### Identify your triggers

What makes you feel stressed out? Keep a list of the situations (or the people) causing you stress. Consider whether or not you can minimize exposure to these triggers or how you can change your interactions. For example, if your weekly trip to three different grocery stores is stressing you out, try going to just one or two and see if that makes a positive difference.

### Change your response

If you are experiencing unhealthy reactions to stress, such as pain, anger, negativity, or overeating, it's time to make some changes. Keep a journal to monitor your reactions to stressful situations and try using stress-relief methods that will help you to redirect those stress responses in the future – for example, deep breathing, meditation, or journaling.

### Build your toolkit

Stress management skills don't always come naturally. What works for one person may not work for the next, so take some time to explore different techniques and identify what works best for you. You can find a range of stress management tools and suggestions through your Assistance Program at [homeweb.ca](http://homeweb.ca).