



HAVING A BALL IS GOOD HEALTH.

Take an active interest in your well-being and take steps to reduce your stress. Being mindful of how your mind and body work together to keep you healthy can help you maintain calm and bounce back from difficult situations.

STRESS AND THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

What causes stress?

Major birthday coming up? Making a presentation at work? Caught in traffic? These are just some of the everyday events that can cause stress, making you anxious, tense, angry, or afraid.

Stress can come from bigger events, too, such as a new job, divorce, or the death of a loved one. In short, you can't avoid stress. But learning how to manage it can improve your emotional well-being—and your physical health.

Stress and your body

When you're under stress, your body releases chemicals (namely, cortisol and adrenaline) that activate a "fight or flight" reaction. These chemicals affect every organ in your body and can cause increased heart rate, muscle tension, and insulin secretion, as well as decreased immune response and libido.

Once the stress passes, these chemicals return to normal levels. But consistent stress can contribute to health problems, including headaches, muscle pain, allergy-like reactions, memory difficulties, and high blood pressure.

(continued on back)

STRESS AND THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Take control of your life.

Your thoughts, moods, attitudes, and behaviors have a big influence on your overall health. Understanding how your mind affects your body can help you reduce the effects of stress, take control of your words and actions, and resolve to make healthy changes in your life.

These simple steps can help you reduce and manage stress on an ongoing basis:

- Exercise and eat a balanced diet.
- Manage your time.
- Set realistic goals and expectations.
- Take time for yourself.
- Stay positive.
- Try to accept what you cannot change. Of those things you can change, try to decide which are really important to you and focus on those.

Learn to relax.

Alongside making healthy lifestyle choices, indulging in simple pleasures can do a lot to help you stay relaxed, happy, and healthy on a daily basis. Here are some relaxation techniques you can use every day:

- Practice deep breathing, meditation, prayer, or guided imagery.
- Take a nap or a hot, soothing bath.
- Curl up and read a good book.
- Watch a funny movie or your favorite TV show.
- Start a small garden or grow an indoor plant.
- Go for a walk or play with a pet.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Call a friend or family member to chat.
- Write in a journal.

Make some healthy changes.

You probably have some ideas about how you can improve your health and change your life for the better. But even when you know the importance of making a change, there's often a gap between

thinking about it and actually doing it. Understanding your thoughts about changing can help bridge that gap and increase the odds that your efforts will be successful and lasting.

Start by evaluating how ready you are to change. Are you still reluctant to make a change, are you just beginning to consider changing, or are you prepared to take action now? This will help you decide how to formulate your plan. Many big changes—like quitting smoking or losing weight—happen as the result of a series of small steps. Instead of worrying about the ultimate goal, try to focus on getting to the next step. And choose strategies that are likely to be most effective for you. Small achievements along the way can help motivate you to keep going.

Whether you want to break a bad habit or start a healthy one, your way of thinking can set you up for success—and a healthier way of life.

Stressed—or depressed?

Sometimes what feels like stress is actually depression. Overlapping symptoms include trouble sleeping, irritability, restlessness, trouble concentrating, sluggishness, and changes in appetite. These symptoms may indicate clinical depression if you experience them consistently for two weeks or more. Signs of depression may also include feelings of worthlessness, being sad all the time, and thoughts of death or suicide.

If you think you're depressed, talk to your doctor. The sooner you get treatment for depression, the sooner you can start feeling better, in both mind and body. Depression isn't a sign of weakness; it's a medical condition that often is successfully treated.

Learn more.

Check out kp.org/mindbody for more tips on how to stay healthy in mind, body, and spirit.

Kaiser Permanente health plans around the country: Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., in Northern and Southern California and Hawaii • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Colorado • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Ohio • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Georgia, Inc., Nine Piedmont Center, 3495 Piedmont Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30305, (404) 364-7000 • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States, Inc., in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., 2101 E. Jefferson St., Rockville, MD 20852 • Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest, 500 NE Multnomah St., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97232