

Weekly Wellness Tip

Symptoms of Stress

Stress affects most of us. It is the reaction we have to any change in our environment or within our bodies. Stress can be a good thing, energizing us as we try new activities and adapt to new circumstances. But stress is not healthy when it occurs many times a day, day in and day out, year in and year out. With chronic stress, our bodies don't fully relax between "threats" but stay tense and poised for the next challenge. Chronic stress is associated with feelings of anxiety and overload.

Unmanaged stress can take a serious toll on our health, our relationships, and our ability to be successful in life. It can lead to unhealthy behavior, such as binge eating or excessive drinking. Over time, stress can contribute to health problems, such as depression and heart disease, and it can suppress your immune system, leaving you more vulnerable to illness. Next week's wellness tip will address different methods of managing stress.

Symptoms of stress

Before managing stress, it is important to become aware of it in yourself. Once you learn to recognize your own body cues, you can begin to treat your stress effectively. Stress affects everyone differently, but some of the most common signs of stress include the following:

Physical symptoms	Psychological symptoms	Behavioral symptoms
Difficulty sleeping	Irritability or hostility	Binge eating or food cravings
Fatigue	Anger	Drug or alcohol abuse
Neck or back pain	Depression	Increase in smoking
Muscle tension	"Floating" anxiety (being anxious or afraid, but you are not sure why)	Withdrawal from relationships or activities that were once pleasurable
Chest pains	Rapid emotional swings	Bullying, aggressive actions
Heart palpitations	Overpowering urge to cry, run, or hide	Increase in use of prescription drugs
Stomach pain or upset stomach		Emotional outbursts
Constipation or diarrhea		Inactivity or lack of energy
Blushing, feeling hot		Over-exercise
Sweaty hands or feet		Inability to focus
Trembling, nervous tics		
Increased menstrual symptoms		
Decreased sexual drive		

Most stress comes and goes. It's normal to notice some of the above symptoms for a few minutes or even a few hours at a time. If you're experiencing these symptoms for days or longer, if you're experiencing racing thoughts, if you're unable to control your emotions or actions, or if you're afraid you might harm yourself or someone else, it's important to seek help immediately (Employee Assistance Information listed in the box below).

Source: LifeWorks

Employee Assistance Program

All employees have access to our free, confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Phone calls are unlimited and can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Additionally, if an in-person referral is made through the EAP, the first three visits are covered at 100%. To access the EAP, call 888.887.4114 (UnitedHealthcare members) or 800.854.1446 (all employees).