



Stress

a little something for all of us

Did you ever catch yourself with your shoulders pulled up around your ears, clenching your teeth, or just being edgy with someone near you and wonder to yourself, “What is happening to me?” Or maybe you find yourself thinking about an upcoming event that feels a bit unpredictable like a job interview or a final exam, and notice your breathing is shallow and your heart is racing.

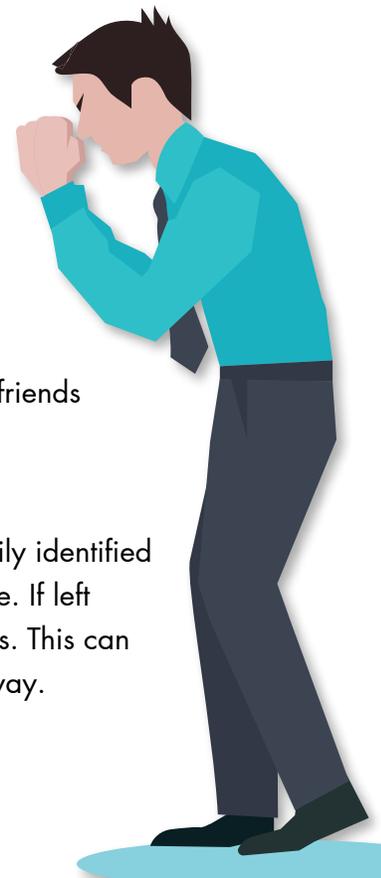
Our body is amazing; it gets us ready to handle events we think are challenging by sending hormonal messages that instruct it to get ready to meet the demands. This is the self-contained system we call the fight/flight/freeze response and it is intended to cope with stressful – good or bad – situations. It helps us to confront situations by giving us extra energy and the ability to focus so we can respond appropriately.

Under most conditions our stress response is a good thing; however, if we can't fight the situation, or run away from it, we might find those hormones that get us prepared, begin to build up. This leaves us with an increase in blood pressure that keeps our muscles tense, our energy high, and keeps us on edge for extended periods. This puts extra pressure on the body and can make us more likely to get sick. Stress is something that we cannot get away from because it is a response to both happy and unpleasant events in our lives. Regardless of the source, managing it effectively should be a priority.

How do you know when you are stressed?

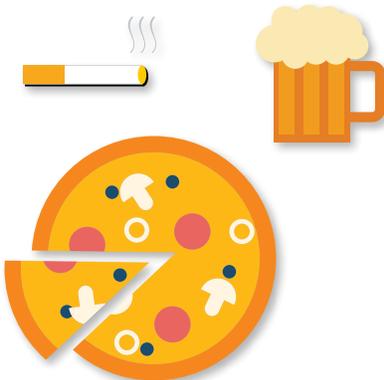
- My muscles get tense, particularly in my lower back, neck, jaw and shoulders
- I get a headache and/or stomachache
- I get irritable with my family, co-workers and friends
- I feel completely worn out and drained

Our physical response to stress can be most easily identified as it is often the first response that we experience. If left untreated, it can affect our thoughts and attitudes. This can be more challenging to cope with in a healthy way.



Is stress a bigger deal with diabetes?

Yes. Part of the body's system that prepares us to manage stress also releases the hormone glucagon, which causes your blood sugar to increase. For people without diabetes, their pancreas produces insulin to combat this increase, but those with diabetes have to rely on medication or other methods to decrease blood sugar levels. If you deal with stress by emotional eating or sitting around, blood sugar levels can be high for an extended period of time. If you experience chronic stress, then more damage can be done to your body.



What negative things do you do to relieve your stress?

- Consume alcohol in excess
- Smoke cigarettes
- Eat chips, ice cream, candy, pizza, etc., in excess
- Avoid people
- Watch TV, play video games, in excess

Each of these is identified as negative because it does not help reduce the build-up of stress. Each of these may temporarily help, but we are still left with the consequences, which have long-term health implications.

What should I do about my stress?

If you can't change it, change your mind. Look at it differently, as not so serious, or find a positive way to see things. While we might not be able to change a situation we often have the ability to change how we see it. For example, you might find yourself stuck in traffic and know you will be late for an appointment. You could become very tense, grip the steering wheel very tightly and try to weave around everyone to get there a minute earlier. Or you could change your mind, turn on some soothing music and remind yourself, it is not the end of the world and one or two minutes isn't going to make a difference.

If you can't change it or change your mind, then let it go. We often build anxiety over what we imagine the outcome of events might be. To practice letting go or having faith is often the best we can do.

Deal with the stress after the fact. Finding positive ways to manage our stress may be our best alternative. Some examples of positive stress management are:

- Exercise
- Meditation or deep breathing
- Taking a walk outside
- Talking with a supportive friend, co-worker or family member
- Listening to music
- Taking a break

Stress is a significant part of life. By accepting this, we know we need to have ways of dealing with it that serve us and help us live well. Diabetes is a stressful part of your life, but you can find positive ways to manage it.

