

# Employee Assistance Program

## Self-Care: Identifying Symptoms of Stress

Stress occurs when you perceive that demands placed on you — such as work, school or relationships — exceed your ability to cope. Some stress can be beneficial at times, producing a boost that provides the drive and energy to help people get through situations like exams or work deadlines. Indeed, stress symptoms can affect your body, your thoughts and feelings, and your behavior. Being able to recognize common stress symptoms can give you a jump on managing them. Stress that's left unchecked can contribute to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

### Common effects of stress on your body

- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Change in sex drive
- Stomach upset
- Sleep problems

### Common effects of stress on your mood

- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or depression

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to manage your stress can reduce or prevent these effects. The following tips may help you to cope with stress:

- **Recognize the signs** of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed and having low energy.
- **Talk to your doctor or health care provider.** Get proper health care for existing or new health problems.
- **Try a relaxing activity.** Explore stress-coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi or other gentle exercises. For some stress-related conditions, these approaches are used in addition to other forms of treatment. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy and relaxing activities. Learn more about these techniques on the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) website at <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>.
- **Set goals and priorities.** Decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload. Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- **Stay connected** with people who can provide emotional and other support. To reduce stress, ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations.

For more information on this topic or for further assistance, please contact your Employee Assistance Program.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). Five things you should know about stress (NIH Pub. No. OM 16-4310). Retrieved March 14, 2017, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>



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