

From the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada  
[www.heartandstroke.com](http://www.heartandstroke.com)

## **Reduce your stress**

Although stress can sometimes be a good thing, too much stress can actually harm your health and increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. So, whether you're dealing with good (for example weddings) or bad (for example death) stress, we can all benefit from learning effective stress-busting techniques.

### **Types of stressors**

Many life events such as moving, leaving school, changing jobs, and experiencing losses can cause stress. Daily hassles, such as being stuck in traffic, deadlines or conflicts can also be stress-provoking. It's important to identify your stressors so you can learn to deal with them effectively.

### **Symptoms of excess stress**

If you are suffering from high stress levels, you may feel tense or anxious, have headaches, stomach complaints or even symptoms that mimic old illnesses. Long-term exposure to stress can also lead to mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.

### **Heart disease, stroke and stress**

The relationship between stress and heart disease and stroke isn't completely clear, but some people with high levels of stress or prolonged stress may have higher blood cholesterol, increased blood pressure or be more prone to developing atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries).

If your life is full of stress, it can be hard to lead a healthy lifestyle. Instead of being physically active to relieve stress, some people respond by overeating, eating unhealthy foods, consuming too much alcohol or smoking reactions that can increase the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

Responding to stress with anger can also be harmful, since it sets off a series of physiological changes including increased heart rate and elevated blood pressure levels that can increase your chance of having a heart attack. And, people who are prone to anger are also more likely to turn to unhealthy behaviours like smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and overeating.

### **Stress-busting tips**

- Identify the source of your stress. Figure out what is really bothering you as it's the first step in managing your stress.
- Be physically active. It can be a great stress-buster and can boost your heart health too. Be sure to talk to your physician before starting any activity program.
- Share your feelings. Talking to friends, family or coworkers can help you feel better.
- Take time for yourself. In trying to meet everyone else's needs, don't short-change yourself. Make time for yourself.
- Make time to laugh. It's your body's natural stress-release mechanism.
- Eat well. Don't skip lunch, and leave the office to eat if you can.

- Don't skip vacations. Getting away from it all is important to your mental and physical health.

For more information on stress, please read our brochure [Stress Test: How fit are you when it comes to managing stress?](#)

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