

Managing Stress: *A Guide for Understanding Stressful or Traumatic Situations*



Defining Stress, Trauma, and Post-Traumatic Stress

What is stress?

Stress is a complex set of reactions that humans experience when confronted with the need to change or adapt to life circumstances.

What are traumatic situations or events?

Traumatic situations or events can make you feel helpless or afraid.

Post-traumatic stress reactions

Post-traumatic stress reactions occur in approximately 20–30 percent of people who experience a traumatic event. It may make you feel like you cannot do your daily activities, such as getting out of bed, going to work, or being around those you love. When these problem behaviors become the new normal, professional assistance may be required to return to wellness.

Fast Facts about Stress

- Stress experiences may differ between people and change over time.
This is especially true if the stressful life event is ongoing.
- Stress is common—most people experience stress, use their inner strengths and skills, learn new skills, and recover over time.
- Sometimes stressful events make you grow stronger, and sometimes there are lingering “scars” from the stress or trauma. These include having flashbacks or avoiding things that remind you of the event.
- You can cope with stress by sticking to your daily schedule, developing new skills, and learning new ways of coping.
- Sometimes professional assistance may help you learn these skills, especially if you are having a difficult time working through the stressful or traumatic event.

Some Level of Stress Is Normal

- Stress reactions are the whole body’s response to life-changing events.
- These reactions are “normal” in the sense that they are predictable.
- It is the life-changing event that is not normal because it leads to a stress experience.

Negative Impacts of Stress

- **Stress and emotions:** Stress can influence your emotions and cause lowered self-esteem and feelings of helplessness, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, anger, rage, numbness, sadness, or defeat.
- **Stress and thoughts:** Stress can influence your thoughts and cause difficulty paying attention, problems remembering, a lack of confidence, feelings of apathy (not caring about others), problems staying focused, perfectionism, denial and avoidance, preoccupation, and thoughts of harming others or yourself.
- **Stress and behavior:** Stress may contribute to behaviors such as impatience, frustration, irritability, agitation/restlessness, withdrawal, moodiness, sleep changes, appetite changes, hypervigilance, and accident proneness.
- **Stress and health:** Stress may lead to adverse health outcomes such as shock, sweating, rapid heartbeat, breathing problems, aches/pains, dizziness, lowered immunity, sensitivity to noise, low energy, and increased medical problems.
- **Stress and relationships:** Stress can impact relationships by causing you to withdraw from others, have a reduced ability to care about others, have feelings of mistrust, feel isolated, misplace anger or blame, be intolerant, experience increased conflict, and be overly protective of the people you are closest to.
- **Stress and work:** Stress could interfere with work by causing low morale, decreased motivation/energy, task avoidance, too much focus on details, loss of interest, negativity, less sensitivity to coworkers, staff conflict, absenteeism, and low energy.

Overcoming Stress and Trauma

- Admit your stress, stay connected with others, and set goals.
- Practice deep-breathing exercises, engage in physical activity, maintain sleep hygiene, and eat a healthy diet.
- For other techniques, see Extension Information Sheet 2005 *Managing Stress: A Checklist for Individuals Experiencing Stress or Traumatic Situations*.

Managing Stress Requires Action Now and a Commitment for the Future

- Skills help most when used routinely, but it can be hard to remember to use the skills.
- Practicing will help you get better at managing stress.
- Practicing bad behaviors will cause you to get better at them, too, so avoid them!
- If you deliberately practice positive skills, you are more likely to remember you have those tools in your toolbox.

Never be ashamed to seek professional help from a licensed counselor, therapist, or psychologist; he or she may be able to help you build or improve on these life skills.

National and State Resources

National Crisis Hotline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Mississippi State Health Department
1-866-HLTHY4U (458-4948)

2-1-1 Mississippi Community Resources
Dial 211 from your phone or 866-472-8265

Local Resources

Developed in collaboration with



The COHORT
Coalition of Healthcare
Organizations for Resiliency Training

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Information Sheet 2004 (POD-02-16)

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Produced by Agricultural Communications.

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Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director