



**HealthMart May 2010**  
**Keeping Stress at Bay**  
By Annie Stuart

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Your 16-year-old just crashed the family car. You got turned down for the job you really wanted. And, you're trying to figure out how to keep your mother who has Alzheimer's from wandering around the neighborhood. Now, if that's not a clear recipe for stress, I don't know what is – and stress with a capital S.

Of course, we all experience stress to one degree or another. Called fight-or-flight, the stress response is an ancient adaptation to threats. The body releases stress-related hormones that provide a burst of energy, along with other changes that make it easier to fight or flee. This worked well for our ancestors who needed to run from a saber-toothed tiger or lead a pitched battle. But today it's less than ideal when you're stuck in traffic or responding to a sassy teen. And, it takes a major toll on you.

Common symptoms of stress include:

- Fast breathing
- Fast heartbeat
- Sweaty palms
- Upset stomach
- Headache
- Muscle pain

Some stress does help you respond to the challenges in your life. But too much is like having a stuck accelerator pedal. It's pretty dangerous stuff. Over time, stress can lead to a whole host of physical, mental, and emotional problems. Because stress depresses your immune system, you might become sick more easily. Or, symptoms from existing diseases and conditions may worsen, such as those related to asthma, peptic ulcer disease, or psoriasis. As a result of stress, you may suffer from heart-related problems – high blood pressure, heart attack, blood clots, abnormal heartbeats.

A recent study in England followed 6,000 workers for more than a decade. It found that women with particularly demanding jobs had a 59 percent higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. And, it was even higher if they were lacking social support at work.

But that's not all. Chronic stress can also affect your emotional and mental health. Who hasn't known someone who's so cranky from stress that they make Scrooge seem downright cuddly? Or, someone who's constantly jittery and unable to focus on their work? Or, someone whose personality has become more anxious or depressed over time? These can all be the result of stress's assault on your thoughts and emotions.

And we haven't even mentioned the ripple effects of stress. Just as secondhand smoke hurts those around you, stress can become "contagious," spreading negative reactions in those it touches.

Luckily, you can manage stress in more ways than one. If one technique doesn't work well for you, try another. Here are a few suggestions for helping you cope better.

- Keep a stress journal to spot your stress triggers. Then rate them on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. Write down how you respond to each trigger and see which approach works best for you.
- If you're always feeling squeezed for time, seek out better methods of time management.
- Learn how to say "no" and ask for help when you need it.
- Rest, eat well, watch your alcohol intake, and be sure to get plenty of exercise.
- Find a relaxing hobby or try new ways to relax – meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, or music.

And, one of the best ways to relax? Have a good laugh with your friends as often as you can.

For more information about stress management and a wide range of other health management topics, go to [www.healthmart.com/](http://www.healthmart.com/).



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or [mcglynnrx@tds.net](mailto:mcglynnrx@tds.net)  
Thanks, Dan McGlynn