



STRESS

# HEAD TRASH

**What are the signs of chronic stress, and what can I do to reduce the negative effects of it on my health?**

Stress is a part of our daily lives. In fact, more than 50% of U.S. adults report feeling highly stressed every day. But not all stress is bad. Stress can keep us aware of our surroundings and help us react to change. It can also keep you focused on reaching a goal.



The idiom, head trash, means to have negative thoughts, feelings, or emotions. These are often assumptions rather than the truth and can get in the way of success.

However, when you experience prolonged stress, it can have a negative impact on your “head trash,” as well as your physical health, work performance, relationships, and general well-being.

### What Is Stress?

Stress is the body’s way of preparing for a real or imagined threat. When you’re under stress, your body prepares for the threat and your heart rate and metabolism increases. Your breathing becomes shallow, and blood is diverted from internal organs and extremities to muscles. Once the stressor passes, your physiological functions usually return to normal.

### Signs of Chronic Stress

Chronic stress can negatively affect our eating habits, lead to substance abuse, and cause social withdrawal. It can also lead to:

- Headaches
- Sleep problems or difficulty relaxing
- Sadness
- Anger
- Irritability
- Memory loss
- Diminished concentration

## HOW STRESS EFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Stress can have wide ranging effects on emotions, mood and behavior. It can also affect our body in a variety of ways.

### Immune System

Stress stimulates the immune system to help heal wounds and avoid infections, but over time, will weaken your immune system. People under chronic stress may be more susceptible to illness and can also take longer to recover from an illness or injury.

### Central Nervous Systems

Your central nervous system controls your “fight or flight” response. When the perceived threat is gone, your brain should direct your systems and hormones to return to normal. If it fails to do so, or if the stressor doesn’t go away, the response will continue, leading to chronic stress.

### Respiratory & Cardiovascular Systems

Stress causes your heart to pump faster. Stress hormones cause your blood vessels to constrict and divert more oxygen to your muscles and lungs to work harder. But this also raises your blood pressure. Frequent or chronic stress can put you at risk of having a stroke or heart attack.

### Digestive System

Under stress, your liver produces extra blood sugar to give you a boost of energy. People with chronic stress may not be able to keep up with this extra glucose surge. Chronic stress can also increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

You’re also more likely to have heartburn or acid reflux when you are under constant stress. Although stress doesn’t cause ulcers, it can increase your risk for them and cause existing ulcers to flare up. Stress can also lead to diarrhea, constipation, nausea, vomiting, and stomach aches.

### Muscular System

When you are under stress, your muscles tense up to avoid injury and release once you relax. If you’re constantly under stress, your muscles may not get the chance to relax, which can lead to headaches, back and shoulder pain, and body aches.

### Tips for Managing Stress

- Walk for 10 minutes to release endorphins.
- Take a break and unplug from your devices.
- Get outdoors and soak up some sun.
- Make time to do something that brings you joy.
- Talk to someone you trust, a professional counselor or physician for help managing your stress.

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

If you or a loved one are having suicidal thoughts, call the confidential toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## ACTION ITEMS

**DO ONE THING:** Recognize the signs of chronic stress and take steps to reduce so that it does not negatively affect your health.

**SHARED DECISION-MAKING:** If you suffer from chronic stress, contact your healthcare provider to get the resources you need to improve your reaction to stress and stay healthy.

