

Calm Your Concerns

Stress and worry – and worrying about your stress – are common side effects of our ever-busy lives. While some amount of stress and worry is beneficial to our productivity, too much tension or prolonged anxiety can produce unwanted side effects. Fortunately, it is possible to combat them. Start by familiarizing yourself with the signs of excess stress and anxiety below, then experiment with the tactics provided to overcome your concerns in exchange for more calm in your daily life.

Possible side effects of stress, worry, and anxiety

...on your body

- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain
- Fatigue / exhaustion
- Change in sex drive
- Stomach upset
- Hot flashes
- Sleep problems
- Feeling faint, dizzy, or lightheaded
- Tingling

...on your mood

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

...on your behavior

- Overeating or undereating
- Angry outbursts

- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Tobacco use
- Social withdrawal
- Exercising less often

...on your overall health

- Increased risk of heart disease and digestive disorders
- Greater susceptibility to colds and the flu
- Overproduction of stress hormones

Source: [Mayo Clinic.org – Stress Symptoms](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20044171)

Keep in mind that having one or more of the symptoms listed above does not necessarily indicate that you have stress, worry, or anxiety. If you're unsure about the source of your symptoms, consult your doctor to rule out other potential causes. Or, if you've been unable to effectively manage your stress, worry, or anxiety, seek the help of a professional therapist who can help you pinpoint the sources and explore various coping techniques.

If you experience chest pain – particularly if accompanied by shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness, nausea, or pain radiating into your shoulder and arm – get emergency help immediately, as these may be signs of a heart attack.

Lessen the effects of stress, worry, and anxiety

Be an active participant

One of the best ways to manage stress is to stay active – physically, mentally, and emotionally. In addition to reducing stress, proactively managing the symptoms of stress can do wonders for your overall health. Here are a few ways you be an active participant in your stress management journey:

- Exercise regularly
- Take a walk to clear your head
- Relax and recharge through meditation, deep breathing, or a visit to the spa
- Laugh and let yourself have fun
- Stay social by engaging with family and friends on a regular basis
- Make time for hobbies or periodically plan to do something you've never tried

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness allows you to be present in the moment and wholly aware of what is going on within and around you. Being mindful can decrease your body's stress response and hush fretful thoughts.

- Each day, take a few moments to sit quietly and focus on your breath
- Notice your thoughts, senses, and environment without engaging or reacting to them
- Intentionally bring the focus back to your breath if your thoughts begin to wander

Take notes

Have you ever stopped to think about *why* you're worried? The next time a particular circumstance, person, or task has you feeling anxious, write it down. Make notes about the situation, answering questions like, "*What is the concern?*", "*Why is it stress-inducing?*", "*What outcome am I fearful of?*", and "*Can I change or control the outcome? How?*"

Over time, these notes will form a blueprint of your worries. Use the notes to assess patterns in your thought process, reactions, and outcomes. Pay attention to common themes, such as time, location, recurrent stressors, the people involved, etc. Once you're aware of what triggers your worries and how you tend to deal with them, the better you'll manage them and begin to worry less.

To find out more about managing stress or calming your concerns, call the EAP today for more information, helpful resources, or to schedule an in-person consultation session.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees and their family members at no cost.

24 HOURS A DAY

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