

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

## *What is stress?*

Stress is your body's response to change, especially a demand or a threat. Stress can be triggered by environmental, physical, or emotional changes—they can be positive or negative changes too. Sometimes stress can be good.

- ▶ Stressful times can be exciting, like the birth of a child or a job promotion.
- ▶ It creates energy for meeting challenges, such as moving to a new neighborhood or making new friends.
- ▶ At times, stress can help a person focus and get motivated.
- ▶ It can push a person to meet deadlines and complete important tasks.
- ▶ It can even help a person respond to danger.

And sometimes stress can be bad.

- ▶ If you have too much stress or have trouble coping, you can feel overwhelmed.
- ▶ Your body's response to stress produces mental, physical, or emotional symptoms.
- ▶ It can affect your sense of well-being, relationships, and other important areas of your life.
- ▶ It also can cause you to feel inadequate and lower your self-esteem.
- ▶ Too much stress can be a trigger for seizures.

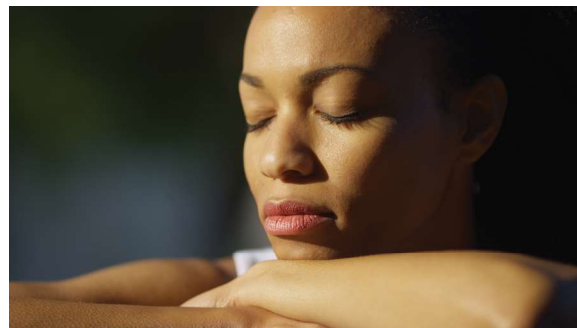


## *Why is stress management important for people living with epilepsy and their caregivers?*

Everyone—people living with epilepsy, family, friends, and other caregivers—feels stress at times. Stress is a normal part of life, but chronic stress is bad for anyone's brain.

For many people living with epilepsy, stress can trigger seizures. Seizures may be more likely to happen at times of stress or may be worse or different than usual.

Living with epilepsy and unpredictable seizures can cause stress too. And people who are taking care of or helping a person with seizures may be susceptible to too much stress as well.



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## *What can I do to manage stress?*

Managing stress is critical to your emotional and physical health. It contributes to your feelings of well-being, improves your social relationships, increases your productivity, and lifts your mood.

## *Here are some strategies to try.*

### **Assess Your Stress**

- ▶ **Study your life stressors.** Begin by tracking your stress. When do you notice it? How often do you feel signs of stress? What do you do when you feel stressed? How do you usually cope with stress?
- ▶ **Keep a journal.** Look at what is going on in your life. If you are feeling angry, anxious, or depressed about people or situations in your life, write about them. This may help you understand these feelings and what's causing them. You may gain insight and find better ways to cope.
- ▶ **Track your mood and stress.** You can use the Foundation's *My Seizure Diary* ([diary.epilepsy.com](http://diary.epilepsy.com)), other digital tools, or a paper seizure diary to help you see patterns with seizures.

### **Use Cognitive Strategies**

- ▶ **Steer clear.** Sometimes it is best to walk away from situations or relationships creating stress in your life. If you can't avoid something, try changing your approach and how you react. This may calm the situation and how you feel.
- ▶ **Breathe.** Try deep breathing when in a stressful situation. Counting to 10 and taking a time out helps too. The extra time gives you a chance to think more objectively and not overreact.
- ▶ **Manage your time.** A daily routine can help you juggle the many demands on your time. Set priorities, pace yourself, and avoid procrastination so you're not rushed. Find time to do the things you enjoy, too—not just the “must do” things.
- ▶ **Meditate.** Mindfulness or meditation can help relax you and restore your inner calm.
- ▶ **Use positive thinking techniques.** Is your life glass half full or half empty? Practice flipping the stress hourglass and see if this gives you a different perspective. Find the silver lining in stressful circumstances. For example, some negative situations can help you learn or improve.



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- ▶ **Learn skills to deal with stress.** Read or watch videos on stress management and discover new ways of coping.
- ▶ **Celebrate your success.** Find ways to see your progress. It takes effort to change old habits, but as you do, take a minute to measure your success and pat yourself on the back.

## Use Physical Strategies

- ▶ **Exercise.** Build physical activity into your life. Find a routine that suits you such as walking, sports, yoga, pilates, tai chi, or gardening. Exercise has proven health benefits not only for your stress level, but also your mood, sleep, and overall health.
- ▶ **Sleep.** Your body needs to re-energize each day. Sleep helps you recover from all the demands on your time and energy. It helps you think more clearly too. Getting quality sleep and enough sleep are important.
- ▶ **Eat healthy foods.** Nutritious foods will give you energy. Find ways to build more nutritious foods into your diet. Try to avoid too much sugar, alcohol, or processed foods.
- ▶ **Listen to music.** This can be soothing or lively and distracting. Dancing to music is also a good way to boogie your stress off.
- ▶ **Take a warm shower.** A warm shower before bedtime can help you relax and be ready to sleep. Be careful to observe bathroom safety tips—people with uncontrolled seizures should take showers instead of baths.
- ▶ **Make some art.** Skill level doesn't matter. Sketching, painting, pottery, crafts, or even coloring benefit all ages. Consider taking an art class.
- ▶ **Get regular massages.** These can relax the tension stored in your body.
- ▶ **Go outside.** Take a break from the indoors and get some sunshine. Connecting with nature has proven benefits to feeling happier and calmer. Being outside and activities like bird watching may help.



## Use Emotional Strategies

- ▶ **Smile.** Even if you don't feel happy, smiling can improve your mood and help you feel more relaxed. Other people may respond more positively to you too.
- ▶ **Manage your anger.** Take classes or read about anger management and conflict resolution. Consider professional help if your anger is interfering with your relationships.
- ▶ **Engage in pleasurable and calming activities.** Make a list of things you enjoy that help you to de-stress and do these regularly.
- ▶ **Find support.** Talking to a family member, friend, or colleague for support can be helpful and reassuring. They may have suggestions that are new to you.

## Seek Help

- ▶ **Talk about it.** Talk about how you feel and how the unpredictability of seizures affects your day-to-day life.
- ▶ **Seek professional help.** Counseling from a mental health provider can teach you about stress management. A counselor can help you work on things that may be causing your stress, such as marital problems or concerns about your child or work.
- ▶ **Get the best seizure control possible.** Work closely with your health care team. Seek help from an epilepsy center to explore all treatment options.
- ▶ **Connect.** Find people who share your interests and who bring out the best in you.
- ▶ **Join the epilepsy community.** Reach out to your local Epilepsy Foundation. Join the forums and chat on [epilepsy.com](http://epilepsy.com) or social media. You will find people who understand and care about your well-being.
- ▶ **Join a support group for people with epilepsy.** Consider joining a support group for stress management, parenting, therapy, or other interests.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ Stress and Wellness: [epilepsy.com/stress-and-wellness](http://epilepsy.com/stress-and-wellness)
- ▶ Managing Seizure Triggers: [epilepsy.com/managing-seizure-triggers](http://epilepsy.com/managing-seizure-triggers)