Life Challenges
You Can Conquer Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety seem to be everyday parts of modern life. It can be hard to keep up with the demands of work, school, parenting, relationships, financial concerns, and other basic daily challenges.

Some level of worry and stress is a normal part of daily life. But if stress or anxiety is not relieved, it can cause problems, including serious emotional ones. It can also hurt your relationships with your friends, family, and co-workers.

If you are feeling stressed out, or having feelings of panic, fears that you cannot control, or painful memories of a traumatic event, here are some tips for coping with the stress:

- **Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet.** Don’t use “comfort” eating to ease stress.
- **Get enough sleep.** Make a plan to get in bed earlier if fatigue is adding to your stress.
- **Exercise regularly.** Start an exercise routine that you can enjoy and sustain. It’s perhaps the best way to cut daily stress.
- **Limit the use of caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.** These can worsen the effects of stress and anxiety.
- **Don’t over-commit yourself.** Packing your schedule can bring on anxiety.
- **Learn relaxation techniques.** Try guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, tai chi, or meditation.
- **Limit your TV news viewing.** If the bad news on TV news is adding to your anxiety, limit your exposure.
- **Don’t neglect your hobbies.** Direct your energy to active hobbies like playing music, gardening, dancing or crafting.

During the second quarter of 2012, we are focusing on the theme of Stress Management. This month we look at ways to cope with stress and anxiety in modern life.

If you’re having trouble managing your stress or anxiety, you can visit [www.Here4TN.com](http://www.Here4TN.com) for ideas, tools and resources—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Or you can call **1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)** to speak confidentially with a caring professional who can offer you practical, solutions-focused counseling.

Additionally, be sure to check out our video highlighting the many resources you can find through the ParTNers EAP. This short video is posted on the home page at [www.Here4TN.com](http://www.Here4TN.com).

Visit [www.Here4TN.com](http://www.Here4TN.com) now!
Eat Healthy to Stay Strong

Today there is more nutritional information available about our foods than ever before. Much of the information can be found on the nutrition labels that accompany almost every type of food and drink. But the pace of modern life doesn’t always encourage us to make wise food choices. Whether it is jamming quick meals in between meetings, eating on the go, and scooping up high-calorie coffee drinks for energy – none are healthy eating habits.

Everyone can get better at eating sensibly. A balanced, nutritious diet – especially one low in fat or sugar – helps to prevent stress. Everything in moderation is a wise guideline to follow.

• **Think and plan before you eat.** Take just a moment to scan the Nutrition Facts label so you have a good idea of how much fat, cholesterol, salt, carbohydrates and calories you’ll be taking in. If the numbers are alarming (and often they are!), try a different food choice.

• **Eat moderately and exercise.** You’ll be better able to control your weight, plus you’ll increase the amount of energy you have to keep stress in check.

• **Eat regular meals mindfully.** Do not skip breakfast or dinner. And take time to enjoy your meals and snacks, without doing other things while you’re eating.

• **When eating out, order and eat wisely.** If portions are big or the food is rich, consider asking for a “doggie box” right away, and take some of the food home for a meal the next day. Or share portions with a dining partner.

• **Don’t eat for comfort to ease stress.** Sometimes we gorge on ice cream or a bag of chips when we’re bored or stressed out. To control such emotional eating, learn to pay attention to your stomach hunger and your feelings. Decide if you’re really hungry or just eating out of habit.

• **Choose snack portions that amount to around 150 calories.** Chomp on apples, carrot sticks, celery or popcorn if you’re craving a good crunch. Soothing foods like yogurt, Jell-O, low-fat ice cream, applesauce or pudding can calm you.

This is just a start. Your ParTNers for Health Wellness Program offers a wealth of additional ideas and tools you can use to gain better control of your eating. Questions about nutrition? Call a ParTNers for Health Wellness coach at 1-888-741-3390. If you notice your food choices are controlled and driven by your emotions, ParTNers EAP can assist with a face-to-face or telephonic counseling session.

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**Sleep Well, Beat Stress**

Getting a good night’s sleep is an important contributor to your overall health, safety and productivity. **Sleep disorders are common, with approximately 120 million Americans suffering from some type of sleep disorder.** These can include insomnia (trouble falling asleep or staying asleep); obstructive sleep apnea (difficulty breathing due to repeated episodes of throat blockage); and narcolepsy (trouble staying awake). While some disorders can be effectively treated with medications, in most cases making small changes to your daily (and nightly!) routine can help.

Here are some recommendations to help you get a better night’s sleep:

• **Watch the beverages.** Avoid caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.

• **Eat lightly.** Eat light snacks to promote sleep; heavy meals can disturb sleep.

• **Exercise regularly.** Do your regular exercise earlier in the day rather than in the evening near bedtime.

• **Keep the environment peaceful.** Keep light and noise to a minimum in the bedroom.

• **Follow bedtime routines.** Do the same things each night, and try to wake and rise at the same time every day, including weekends.

• **Limit the naps.** If you’re tired and need to take a short nap during the day, keep it brief and do it early in the day. If you notice you are taking regular naps, try going to bed earlier in the evening. Start going to bed 15 minutes earlier each night until you are getting enough sleep.
Confronting Stress

Positive or good stress (known as eustress) can help you get things done, rise to daily challenges, and fire you up to do great work under deadline-type pressure. However, any problem or demand that you consider too much or too frequent a challenge can be a negative "stressor" that takes a toll on you. It’s important to develop healthy ways to respond when you feel stress. To achieve results:

Don’t “self-medicate”. For some people, it is tempting to use alcohol or other substances in an attempt to lessen their anxiety symptoms. However, this often does not help, and in fact can trigger a vicious cycle of substance use that makes their anxieties worse over time.

Adopt stress management techniques. Effective steps include getting more rest; eating in moderation; limiting caffeine, nicotine and alcohol; and trying specific relaxation techniques like meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and yoga.

Learn how to tackle stressful situations. While every person’s reaction to a stressful experience is different, it is important to make the effort to find a workable solution to the situation. You might ask yourself:

• Can you physically change the situation to make it less stressful?
• If the stressor can't be changed, can you pay less attention to it or "compartmentalize" it?
• Can you lessen the stressor’s negative impact by thinking about more positive ways to look at the situation?
• If the stressor can’t be changed, what other stressors can you change in order to avoid the pileup of stressors?

Get help when needed. If the physical symptoms of stress and anxiety are interfering with your daily life, it is important to seek help. Your ParTNers EAP offers resources to help you deal with life’s challenges. Call today.

Question: What is the difference between feeling stressed and having an anxiety disorder?

Answer: Stress can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous, worried, or even anxious. What is stressful to one person may not be stressful to another.

Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension or fear. You may not know the source of this uneasiness, which can add to the distress you feel.

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